Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministry
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Effective Skills for Youth Retreat Ministry
Listening Skills

Presenter Outline

Introduction
Because young people bring all of themselves with them when they go on retreat—their joys and sorrows, pains, struggles, successes and victories—Retreat Leaders and Retreat Team Members need to know how to listen in ways that help youth encounter God’s grace, love and mercy already present and active in their lives. To be able to tend to the spiritual needs of youth, to their health and well-being, and, if necessary, to safeguard them against danger, retreat leaders and team members must be skilled at what has been called active or redemptive listening.

This workshop will familiarize participants with the basic skills of active listening, including: avoiding communication roadblocks; establishing a listening posture and behavior; reflection of content and feelings through paraphrasing, summarizing and reflecting behaviors and feelings. Important: this workshop cannot thoroughly impart these skills; rather, the workshop is meant to be a starting point or orientation to basic communication skills that must be developed and refined later.

Objectives
By the conclusion of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- identify typical roadblocks to effective attending/listening
- name specific behaviors and skills that assist in redemptive listening
- demonstrate the skill of active listening

Outline (2 ½ hours)

10 min Welcome, Introductions, Session Overview, Prayer

10 min Brainstorming Session: Good v. Poor Listeners
- Divide into small groups of five or so; supply each group with two sheets of newsprint entitled "Good Listening Behaviors" and "Poor Listening Behaviors".
- Brainstorm as many qualities as possible under each heading. (Try to get at specific behaviors.) Report from each group.
- Facilitator indicates the most frequently mentioned or common elements.

25 min Session on Non-Verbal Behaviors
- Facilitator moves participants into a series of dyads; each dyad will complete an activity that demonstrates the importance of non-verbal communication. The facilitator leads into each dyad, then asks individuals to switch to a new partner after each activity. Both partners in each dyad get a chance to do both the listening and talking roles. The facilitator will debrief after each dyad, then debrief after the series of activities is completed.
Activities:
  o Tell your partner about the most exciting thing that's happened to you this past year – while sitting on your hands.
  o Tell your partner about a time you were really embarrassed -- with your eyes closed.
  o Role play a conflict situation (e.g., a curfew violation with one person as the teenager, the other as a parent); varying their positions: one standing/one sitting; reverse; conclude with both on same level.

Debriefing Issues:
  o General reactions
  o Specific reactions to activities
  o Other examples of non-verbal behaviors that affect communication?
  o Facilitator reviews SOLER model (squarely, open, leaning forward, eye contact, relaxed.)

20 min Session on Communication Roadblocks
  ▪ Facilitator reviews roadblock sheet; participants are asked to "grade" themselves according to the scale: 5-very often; 4-often; 3-sometimes; 2-seldom; 1-never.
  ▪ Brief discussion on roadblocks ensues. (Surprises? Insights?)

10 min Break

45 min Session on Helpful Verbal Communication Behaviors / Active Listening Skills
  ▪ Facilitator explains PARAPHRASING: accurate reflection of CONTENT; then models it with a volunteer.
    o Procedure: Facilitator is the listener and a volunteer is the speaker. Using the verbal and non-verbal techniques outlined on page 2 of the Participant’s Packet, the facilitator listens to the volunteer as he/she explains something “technical”— how to bake a cake, set up a Christmas tree, how to drive a car, etc. (This activity is about listening to information or opinions, not feelings, and accurately reflecting it back to the speaker.) Facilitator (listener) then paraphrases what he/she has heard.
  ▪ Group Activity: The participants are divided into triad to experience these techniques in a safe environment for themselves. Have triads choose one listener, one speaker, one observer. Remind speakers that they are to share information, not feelings, during this activity.
  ▪ Debriefing: triad discusses what that experience was like: Difficult? Easy? Accurate? Did the speaker feel heard and understood? (As time allows, triads can switch roles.)
  ▪ Facilitator explains REFLECTION OF FEELINGS: accurate reflection of the feelings being communicated; then models it with a participant.
    o Procedure: The facilitator is the listener and a volunteer is the speaker. Using the verbal and non-verbal techniques outlined on page 2 of the Participant’s Packet, the facilitator listens to the volunteer as he/she role plays out a stereotypical adolescent scenario—“I hate school….” (This activity is about listening to how a person is feeling and accurately reflecting that back to the speaker.) Facilitator (listener) then demonstrates reflecting back the feelings he/she has heard.
  ▪ Group Activity (Triad sharing as outlined above): Facilitator offers possible topics: describe a time when you felt angry, afraid, lonely, disappointed, afraid, excited, happy, peaceful, anxious, proud, nervous, loving, accepted, sad, ecstatic, etc.
  ▪ Debriefing:
    o General reactions from participants
    o Specific reactions to their roles as speaker, listener and observer
    o Other examples of behaviors that affect communication?
- Facilitator describes two other skills listed in the Participant’s Packet: summarizing and reflection of behaviors.

20 min **Group Discussion: When and why is it appropriate to listen this way while on retreat?**
- Facilitator highlights the following points:
  - The most common place for this kind of listening on retreats will occur in dyads, small group discussions, or whenever a youth seeks you out. Strict adherence to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati *Decree on Child Protection* (revised 2013) regarding the presence of two adults should be maintained in this situation.
  - A person needs to find his/her own solutions and come to greater self-understanding.
  - It helps a person discover his/her own strengths and resources.
  - It avoids creating a dependent relationship.
  - Giving advice is presumptuous—listener usually does not understand but presumes understanding based on personal experience.
  - It works: reflecting understanding can help defuse tense situations, establish accurate understandings, and generally assist a mutual relationship of trust.
- Discussion: What would it be like to do this with kids?
- **When is this kind of listening not appropriate?**
  - It is imperative that Retreat Team Leaders and Retreat Team Members are well versed in identifying life-threatening behaviors young people may be exhibiting or dangerous situations that they may be subject to. The model presented above is superfluous in the event of an imminent life-threatening situation. **Act first to remove the youth from danger.** These are circumstances when an Adult Team Member must act:
    - when a youth reports any kind of abuse whether it’s physical, sexual, verbal or emotional, even if the youth later recants;
    - if the adult suspects any kind of physical, sexual, verbal or emotional abuse;
    - if the adult suspects the youth is in danger because s/he exhibits life-threatening behavior or has made statements to that effect.
  - In these circumstances, action must be taken immediately to ensure their safety. Even if there is doubt about whether or not something should be reported, the rule is to err on the side of prudence: **ALWAYS REPORT IMMEDIATELY.**

Any allegation of child abuse that was not the result of a church volunteer or employee must be reported to all three of the following: Civil authorities, Retreat leader, Pastor/Principal. In the event the allegation involves a church volunteer or employee the incident MUST also be reported to the Chancellor of the Archdiocese at (513) 421-3131.

10 min **Q&A & Evaluations**

**Materials & Handouts**

Materials: newsprint, markers, nametags

Handouts: Participant’s Packet (Some Helpful Communication Skills, Roadblocks to Effective Listening, “Listen”)

Effective Skills for Retreat Ministry

Listening Skills Workshop

Participant’s Packet
Some Helpful Communication Skills

NON-VERBAL: THE SOLER RULE

1. **Squarely**: Keeping one's body directly toward the one talking; not angling or turning one's body sideways, but keeping it squarely in toward the person.

2. **Openly**: Avoiding crossed arms and legs. Maintaining an open posture to the one talking.

3. **Leaning Forward**: Avoid leaning away or back in an inattentive posture. Maintaining a posture that communicates attention and the intent to listen.

4. **Eye Contact**: Avoid looking away, wandering eyes. Maintaining a comfortable amount of eye contact.

5. **Relaxed**: Avoid evident tension, anxiety or intensity in oneself as a listener. Maintaining a relaxed and comfortable presence.

VERBAL:

1. **Paraphrase**: Stating in your own words what the other person has said to you. Ex.: “So you think you're really in love with him?” “It sounds like Sally really hurt your feelings.”

2. **Reflecting Feelings**: Identifying feelings by name, simile, figure of speech or action urge. Ex.: “You're very upset.” “You feel like a caged animal.” “You were really jazzed.” “You felt like driving off a cliff.”

3. **Reflecting Behaviors**: Reporting specific, observable actions without making accusations or judgments. Ex.: “That’s the third time you have gotten out of your chair.” “You are speaking a hundred miles an hour.” “You are tapping your feet, cracking your knuckles and flipping your pencil into the air.”

4. **Perception Check**: Describing what you perceive to be the other’s inner state in order to make sure you really understand what the person feels or is saying. Ex.: “That seemed to hurt your feelings. Did it?” “You seem pretty depressed. How are you feeling?” “I get the impression that you're feeling more comfortable now. Is that the case?”

5. **Summarizing**: Pulling together the different things a person has said into a summary statement. Ex.: “It sounds like your breakup with your boyfriend, your struggle with your parents and your tense work situation are really getting to you, making you feel upset and depressed.”

6. **Short, Encouraging Responses**: Offering brief, verbal indications that one is listening. Ex.: “Uh-huh.” “I hear you.” “Okay.” “Yeah.”
7. **Questing:** Different from questioning or interrogating, questing involves asking open-ended questions that invite the talker to say more. Ex.: “So, John, you seem kind of down…want to talk?” “You were fired…how did that feel?” “So, your Dad is mad at you…what’s that like for you?”

### Roadblocks to Effective Listening

**Directions:** Think about your own communication habits. In the space provided, rate each item, noting how often those roadblocks appear in your conversation.

5-Very often; 4-Often; 3-Sometimes; 2-Seldom; 1-Never

_____1. **Ordering, Directing, Commanding:** “Stop complaining.”

_____2. **Warning, Admonishing, Threatening:** “If you do that, you’ll be sorry.”

_____3. **Moralizing, Preaching, Exhorting:** “You shouldn’t get angry like that.”

_____4. **Lecturing, Teaching, Giving Logical Advice:** “If you just think through objectively….” “It’s obvious that….”

_____5. **Advising, Giving Solutions, Suggesting:** “If I were you, I would….”

_____6. **Judging, Criticizing, Blaming:** “That’s an immature point of view.”

_____7. **Praising, Agreeing, Placating:** “But you’re one of the nicest people I know.”

_____8. **Ridiculing, Shaming, Name-Calling:** “Don’t be such a jerk.”

_____9. **Interpreting, Analyzing, Diagnosing:** “Maybe you’re really just jealous.”

_____10. **Reassuring, Sympathizing, Consoling:** “I’m sure you’ll feel differently about it tomorrow.”

_____11. **Probing, Questioning, Interrogating:** “When did you start to feel this way?”
LISTEN

When I ask you to listen to me and you start giving me advice, you have not done what I asked.

When I ask you to listen to me and you begin to tell me why I shouldn’t feel that way, you are trampling on my feelings.

When I ask you to listen to me and you feel you have to do something to solve my problems, you have failed me, as strange as that may seem.

Listen!!! All I asked was that you listen. Not talk or do – just hear me.

Advice is cheap. You can get both Billy Graham and Dear Abby in the same newspaper.

And I can do for myself; I’m not helpless. Maybe discouraged or faltering, but not helpless.

When you do something for me that I can and need to do for myself, you contribute to my fear and weakness.

But when you accept the simple fact that I do feel what I feel, no matter how irrational, then I can quit trying to convince you and can get about the business of understanding what’s behind this irrational feeling.

And when that’s clear, the answers are obvious and I don’t need advice. Feelings make sense only when we understand what’s behind them.

So, please listen, and just hear me. And, if you want to talk, wait a minute for your turn. Then I’ll listen to you.