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## CHAPTER 4

# BEING GOOD COMMUNICATORS: LISTENING REFLECTIVELY

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Chapter 4 offers techniques and strategies for good communication skills. Achieving peace in our personal lives as well as in the global context requires that we understand how to listen and talk to each other. Effective communication skills are the cornerstone of resolving conflicts and ensuring smooth relationships in our social interactions. In this chapter, students will explore ways to become better listeners. As students examine dialogues for language that promotes good will and understanding, they will expand their vocabularies and practice creating effective responses to conflict situations.

Teachers can use the proposed lesson by itself or expand it by adding additional activities in related lessons. The Internet resources given at the end of the chapter provide many ideas for developing lessons on good communication skills. The activities presented in this chapter are easily adapted to serve students from different levels of proficiency.



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### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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Knowing how to make peace and resolve conflict involves the desire to do so and the understanding of how peace is achieved. To be peacemakers, we need skills that bring about an atmosphere of harmony in our daily lives and a de-escalation of conflict when we try to help others to work out their differences. Such mediation requires that we communicate in a fair and impartial way. Each of us determines whether a situation is or is not a conflict by interpreting what we observe according to our specific needs, values, and experiences. These perceptual "filters" are what accounts for the same situations being understood in different ways by participants in a conflict situation. To help people deal with conflict, we must be able to negotiate through a process of communication which might look like this:

<b>Communication Process Chart</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation (We register through our senses that something is happening.)</li><li>• Perception (We interpret this observation according to our needs, values, and experiences.)</li><li>• Encoding (We formulate this interpreted event into speech and gestures.)</li><li>• Transmission and Reception (A listener now receives the message that we encoded.)</li><li>• Decoding (The receiver sorts out the message for understanding, using linguistic cues as well as para-linguistic information - for example, body language and facial expressions.)</li><li>• Perception (The receiver interprets the message through the perceptual filters of his or her own needs, values, and experiences.)</li></ul>



Experts in mediating and negotiating conflict situations tell us that we are most aware of the steps of transmission and reception and tend to be less aware of the roles of observation and perception. In order to learn good communication skills, we need to become aware of the elements of the communication process and to avoid possible communication breakdowns. Two of the ways we can do this are by practicing techniques that help us to become more aware of how we observe and by examining the role of perception in our understanding of a situation. Elements that help to de-escalate a conflict situation in preparation for resolutions include the following:

- Reporting accurately what we observe
- Clarifying our perceptions
- Not jumping to conclusions or making assumptions too quickly
- Practicing reflective listening by paraphrasing what we hear people say in a non-judgmental way

Careful observation of a situation and an understanding that our interpretation of the event and the role of others in the event is influenced by our own needs and experiences will help us to be better peacemakers. We will be more impartial and less quick to make an assumption or jump to a conclusion. A well-known technique that is very useful in clarifying a conflict situation is that of reflective listening. Behaviors of listening reflectively include adopting a physical posture of attentiveness, making direct eye contact, and using facial expressions to convey a genuine attitude of respect and attention. In reflective listening, the listener actively attends to the message of the speaker and immediately afterward paraphrases the message for the speaker, reflecting back both the facts and the feelings that he or she heard. Hearing someone else "reflect" the message gives the speaker an opportunity to confirm or correct the "perception" of the listener. The goal of reflective listening is to clarify and define the situation accurately, so that the process of resolution can begin. Ways that we can adjust the language that we use in reflective listening include the following:

<b>Language Tips for Reflective Listening</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rephrasing to be more precise</li> <li>• Prefacing our remarks with phrases like "Sounds like...", "So,...", "In other Words...", "You're saying..."</li> <li>• Avoiding <i>absolute</i> words such as "always" and "never"</li> <li>• Replacing "loaded" words that carry emotional messages with neutral words. For example "wastes time" could be rephrased as "takes time to..."</li> <li>• Using words and phrases that have positive connotation in the paraphrase. For example "She always wastes time" could be reflected as "You want to work more efficiently."</li> <li>• Reflecting the emotional tone of the message as well as the words. A suggested sentence frame to use in reflective listening is: "Sounds like you feel _____ because _____".</li> </ul>

Becoming an effective communicator in a peacemaking process takes time, patience, and skill. By working to become good communicators, we can individually contribute to make the world a more peaceful place to live, work, and interact.



## CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The following activities are from books about peacemaking and peacekeeping skills and from the classrooms of educators who make social communication skills a priority in their lessons. The activities incorporate the language skills of listening and speaking within the context of achieving harmony and good will in an interaction and de-escalating situations in which conflict has occurred. Social interaction skills are enhanced as students respond to situations that require effective communication. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this 50-minute lesson to meet the language, content, and social interaction needs of their students.



## PRELIMINARY LESSON PLANNING

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### *Materials:*

For the Warm-up Activity you need two large pictures of interesting scenes that involve social interaction. For one of the pictures, make an overlay which allows only a part (a very interesting or intriguing part) of the picture to be seen.

For the Transition Activity, you will need a copy of the [Communication Process Chart](#) from Background Information for Chapter 4.

For Activity #1, you will need an example of a conflict situation to relate to your students and a mediation scenario related to the conflict situation, in which the participants and a mediator create a dialogue. You will also need a large chart on which you have copied [Language Tips for Reflective Listening](#). An example of a conflict situation and a related mediation scenario are provided in [Activity #1](#) for you to use. However, you might want to choose another conflict situation that is more appropriate for your students' ages, interests, or language needs. [Appendix A](#) provides conflict situations for the students to work with in Activity #1.

[Appendix B](#) provides statements for students to paraphrase according to the guidelines for reflective listening in the Wrap-up Activity.

Students will need to have lexical notebooks and journals for recording new vocabulary and writing about their experiences as reflective listeners throughout Chapter 4.



## WARM UP ACTIVITY

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(approximately 10 minutes)

### *Purpose:*

- To review the elements of accurate observation
- To explore the students' individual "perceptual filters"

### *Materials:*

- A large picture of a social situation
- A picture of another social situation in which only one (very intriguing) part of the picture is revealed (an overlay with a hole in it can be placed over the picture to achieve this effect)

### *Procedure:*

1. Show students a large picture, and ask them to look at it carefully. Ask them to list and then rank three things that they think are the most important or interesting about the picture. Have them share their lists. Point out that not only did people list different things, but that they felt different things were important or interesting.
2. Show students a different picture with an overlay, so that only an intriguing part of the picture is revealed. Ask them to write what they think the picture is about based only on the part that they see. Then ask them to share their ideas. Point out that it is difficult to say anything accurate based on so little information.



## Transition Activity

(approximately 5 minutes)

Put the [Communication Process Chart](#) on the chalkboard and discuss the communication process. Ask students what points in the process the two Warm-up Activities revealed (e.g., observing accurately and objectively and getting the whole picture of a conflict situation). Tell students that in the rest of the lesson they will practice other techniques that promote good communication skills.



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## ACTIVITY #1

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(Approximately 20 minutes)

*Purpose:*

- To understand and practice the process of reflective listening as it relates to conflict resolution

*Materials needed:*

- An example of a conflict situation and a related mediation scenario
- A large chart containing [Language Tips for Reflective Listening](#)
- The three conversations in [Appendix A](#)

*Procedure:*

1. Ask the students what information people need to begin resolving conflicts. As they offer suggestions, write on the chalkboard the phrases: Who is involved?, When did this happen?, Where did the situation take place?, What is the conflict about?, How does each participant feel?, and Why did the conflict occur?. Add any phrases that students may suggest.
2. Tell the students to listen as you tell them about a conflict situation, paying attention to the information that answers the questions on the chalkboard. The following is an example of a conflict situation that you might use:

The teacher in an ESL class likes to have students do projects together. The present project involves using the library to find information about space travel. Juan and Elena are not able to work together and are arguing with each other. Juan thinks that he has to do everything and that Elena wastes time by looking up things not directly related to the assignment. Elena thinks that by looking up other things she gets more ideas to make the project interesting. She also thinks that Juan wants to use only his own ideas in the project.

5. Ask the students to write a summary of the conflict situation, as they would tell it to someone who had not been there and to share their summaries with another student. Are there any differences in the summaries? Ask why it is important to listen carefully and report accurately in helping to resolve a conflict.
6. Give the students a script of the conflict situation that you related to them earlier.

Together with the class, create a mediation scenario to clarify this conflict. Ask for suggestions for statements from Juan (*J*), Elena (*E*), and the mediator (*M*), who will paraphrase what Juan and Elena have said. Help with the paraphrasing so that there are several ways to reflect the participants' statements. Refer to the chart of "Language Tips for Reflective Listening" for students to refer to as they practice working with reflective listening. Put the scenario on the chalkboard or a transparency. Here is an example:

*J:* She's not doing any of the work. I have to do the whole report myself.

*M:* I see. You feel that you have to do most of the work because Elena isn't contributing to the project.

*J:* Right. When we look things up, she wastes time looking up things that don't have anything to do with the assignment.

*M:* So, you want to work efficiently.

*J:* Yeah.

*E:* But I get lots of ideas for our project by looking at other things. Juan, you're so bossy that I never get to say what my ideas are.

*M:* You feel you don't have a chance to contribute your ideas because Juan doesn't give you time to develop and share them.

*J:* I work different from her.

*M:* I'm beginning to see the problem here. Juan wants to work quickly and efficiently but not get stuck doing everything. Elena wants to take more time and have her ideas listened to. Does that sound right?

*E & J:* Yes.

7. With the class, go over the scenario to see how the mediation language helped to clarify the situation and de-escalate the conflict. Point out the nonjudgmental way the mediator states the situation and the positive language that is used to describe both points of view (e.g., work efficiently, develop ideas, and take more time). Point out that the mediator does not impose an opinion or solution during this clarification process.



## ACTIVITY #2

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(approximately 15 minutes)

*Purpose:*

- To practice the skill of reflective listening
- To practice paraphrasing within the context of mediation

*Materials needed:*

- [Appendix A](#)
- English language Lexicons or a Thesaurus

*Procedures:*

1. Ask students to work in triads with one of the situations in Appendix A to develop a possible mediation scenario. Ask students to use a Lexicon or Thesaurus to find words and phrases that they could use in their reflection statements. Work with each triad to help students find suitable reflective statements for the scenarios.
2. Ask students to share their scenarios with the class. Discuss instances of good use of paraphrasing language for mediation.

1. Ask students to add the new vocabulary and phrases to their lexical notebooks.



## COOL DOWN ACTIVITY

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(Approximately 5 minutes)

Purpose:

- To end the class with a focus on the language of mediation.

Materials needed:

- [Appendix B](#)

Procedure:

1. Give the students the statements in Appendix B.
2. Ask the students to reframe statements in their own words so that they also reflect good mediation language. Ask them to share their statements with a partner. Walk around the class to help the groups with wording and lexical choices.



## EXTENSIONS

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1. Ask the students to work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm for statements that participants could make during a conflict situation. (For example, *She never listens to my ideas*. Or *He always shouts out the answers*.) Tell students to write down these statements, and then to practice reflecting the statements in their own words. Tell them to refer to the "Language Tips for Reflective Listening" chart as they work. The groups or pairs can then exchange their lists with another group and practice the reflecting language on the new statements. Groups then compare the different reflections to the same statements.

2. Ask the students to use the conflict situations in [Appendix A](#), which they did not do in Activity #1, as homework to create possible mediation dialogues. These dialogues can (1) be shared in class and followed by discussion, (2) be given to the teacher for her comments, or (3) be reproduced as scenarios for the class after the teacher has commented and the students have edited their work.

3. Ask the students to practice reflective listening in discussions outside class. For example, they should consciously use the technique in several interactions during one day. The interaction can be any discussion and should not be a conflict situation. Ask the students to keep a log of the experience in their journals and to note how they felt during the interaction. Were any "reflections" corrected? If so, what misunderstanding occurred?

4. Prepare specific exercises that require students to use a dictionary or a Lexicon or Thesaurus. Give students five key phrases that might be useful to reframe a statement in a mediation situation. Tell them to look up the key words in the Lexicon or Thesaurus and prepare lists of words that are similar in meaning and lists that are opposite in meaning. Point out that the words need to be appropriate in the context of the mediation phrase. Have students add these lists to their lexical notebooks for use in preparing mediation scenarios. Examples of key phrases might be: "is not respectful," "is too bossy," "shows a bias," "blames you for," "ignores you."



## APPENDIX A

### Conflict Situations

1. Marta and Deena are sisters. Deena is one year younger than Marta is. Marta thinks that Deena is a pest because she always hangs around when Marta has friends to the house. The only way she can get any privacy is to tell Deena directly to go away. Deena thinks that Marta is stuck-up and selfish. Deena knows Marta's friends, and even plays on the school soccer team with some of them. She never minds when Marta walks home with her and her friends after school.

2. Sam is Joan's supervisor. He asks for a client report within a day after each of her meetings, and it is never on time. He thinks she is irresponsible and disrespectful, and he often reprimands her for her tardiness. Joan works very well with her office mates and has brought in several new clients for the firm in the past months. She thinks Sam is unreasonable and unappreciative. Her reports are complete and insightful, so why should he mind if they are a day or two late?

3. Joy was appointed by the Dean as the Chairperson of the Student Affairs Committee. She works hard to present an issue-centered agenda and wants to be able to present the Dean with resolved issues after the meetings. She often leaves the meetings feeling frustrated and ineffective. All the other students want to do is talk endlessly around the issues. She thinks they are acting immature and not being serious. Mark, one of the committee members, thinks that Joy has let the position of Chairperson go to her head. He says that she has her own agenda and doesn't allow anyone else's ideas to be discussed. If she continues to ram things through, no one will come to the meetings.

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### Reflecting Statements

Read each of the statements. Reframe the statement in your own words to reflect a positive understanding.

1. John is too bossy. It's no fun to work with him. I would rather do this by myself.
2. I always have to clean the car, and I never get to use it. It is just not fair.
3. Rita always butts in when we are having a conversation. Why can't she mind her own business?
4. I can never do anything right. Mom's nagging is really getting to me.
5. Cindy is the messiest person I know. Her stuff is everywhere and I'm sick of it.
6. Jim is never on time. I'm always waiting for him. It's no use making plans with him.
7. You really can't count on Susan. She said she would return my book, but I think she lost it. Don't loan her anything!
8. That team is bad news. They have big mouths and play too rough. Besides, they cheat.

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