

The Five Practices of Compassionate ListeningSM

The intention of Compassionate Listening is to access our deepest wisdom to transform separation and conflict into an opportunity for connection, healing and peace. **Compassionate listening is:**

- **A personal practice** – to cultivate inner strength, self-awareness, self-regulation and wisdom.
- **A skill set** – to enhance interpersonal relations and navigate challenging conversations.
- **A process** – to bring individuals or groups together to bridge their differences and transform conflict.
- **A healing gift** - to offer a compassion to a person who feels marginalized or is in pain.

We engage in Compassionate Listening through five core practices:

1. **Cultivating Compassion.** This includes the ability to:
 - Anchor in your own heart and essence and connect to another.
 - Cultivate compassion for yourself.
 - Find the feelings of the other within you and allow that to guide an atmosphere of connection/healing.
 - Experience and express gratitude and appreciation for yourself and others.
 - Seek the gifts offered by conflict and hurt.
 - Practice forgiveness of yourself and of others.
 - Engage in on-going personal work to heal your own wounds.
2. **Developing the Fair Witness.** This includes the ability to:
 - Build capacity to stay centered in the “fire” of intense interactions or strong emotion.
 - Notice, unpack and contain your own triggers.
 - Look at a situation objectively by “going to the balcony”, considering each person’s role and stepping into their shoes to see their perspective.
 - Suspend judgment of yourself and others.
 - Distinguish the impact of someone’s words or actions from their intention.
 - Use language that reflects non-judgment (the language of the Fair Witness) when asking questions or providing feedback to others.
 - Seek information and experiences that expand your open-mindedness and increase your capacity to hold complexity and ambiguity.
 - Maintain a process of self-exploration to enhance your awareness and discern the voice of deep wisdom from the field of inner chatter.

3. **Respecting Self and Others.** This includes the ability to:
 - Resist giving advice unless asked.
 - Trust each person’s ability to solve his or her own problems (stay out of the rescue/drama triangle).
 - Discern how your emotional state impacts the group.
 - Practice self-care and take responsibility for your emotional well-being.
 - Be respectful of people’s differing tolerance levels and capacity for managing conflict.
 - Hold the intention to “do no harm.”
 - Take responsibility: “I am part of what is unfolding, not separate from it.”
 - Welcome connection yet set respectful limits, akin to creating a healthy membrane between yourself and another.

4. **Listening with the Heart.** This includes the ability to:
 - Anchor in the heart when listening for the deeper qualities beneath the stories we hear.
 - Quiet your mind.
 - Stay grounded in your body.
 - Create spaciousness to manage the tension created by a multiplicity of views and feelings.
 - Offer listening as a gift, choosing to keep your opinions, stories and interpretations out of the way (“less is more”).

5. **Speaking from the Heart.** This includes the ability to:
 - Anchor your energy in the heart when seeking words of understanding and connection.
 - Be courageous in giving voice to what has truth and meaning.
 - Use language that reflects your ability to connect to the wholeness of the other.
 - Use language that reflects a healing intention.
 - Identify in words underlying needs.
 - Use “reflective listening” effectively.
 - Name the essence of the issue, feeling, or concerns expressed.
 - Reframe issue, need, or situation to promote strength and healing.

Listening Generously

“Listening creates a holy silence. When you listen generously to people, they can hear truth in themselves, often for the first time. And in the silence of listening, you can know yourself in everyone. Eventually, you may be able to hear, in everyone and beyond everyone, the unseen singing softly to itself and to you.” Rachel Naomi Remen, MD.