

Reach Out!

A Center Linking College and Community Mentors with Children and Teens

Intentional Dialogue & Active Listening Workshop Preview

Introduction

What makes or breaks most relationships? We place our bets on two people being either able to or not able to have genuine, caring and respectful communication! Our desire to engage in honest and sincere dialogue with one another heightens trust for the relationship, as well as growth and development for each individual.

What do we mean by “intentional dialogue?”

Intentional dialogue occurs when there is an honest and respectful reciprocal exchange of ideas, beliefs, information, feelings and meanings. Intentional dialogue requires a sincere commitment and desire to both “listen” and “hear” the other person. Dialogue takes two willing and able individuals.

What do we “dialogue” about?

When we truly talk and share with another person, the topics and meanings are highly complex and really hard to pin down into neat categories. We tend to get a handle on what we “say and share” by looking at:

- Ideas – notions, plans, inklings, impressions, thoughts
- Beliefs – opinions, convictions, spiritual truths, religious tenets
- Information – news, facts, data, observations
- Feelings – emotions, personal reactions, sensitivities
- Meanings – passions, intentions, aspirations, hopes, legacies, life purposes

Concept of Intentional Dialogue

The basic concept of intentional dialogue relates to two people sincerely putting aside themselves to “hear and listen” to the other person.

This sounds simple. In real life, we probably rarely or only occasionally stop to “hear and listen” to someone else. Likewise, we may seldom find that another person stops to “hear and listen” to us!

The following examples and non-examples may help you understand committed dialogue and respectful communications. Try to write down some of your examples and

non-examples. Sadly, the non-examples often come more easily from our life experiences and relationships. However, do strive to jot down both examples and non-examples!

Example of Intentional Dialogue

I work to focus on you while you talk.
I commit to you and give you time.
I put aside my view and experience and fully "hear" yours.

Non-example of intentional dialogue

I ponder other things while you speak.
I want to go somewhere and hurry you.
I interrupt to share my view and experience.

Intentional Dialogue & Active Listening Principles & Facts

Basic guiding principles:

- Patience is evident as we fully listen to and understand another person.
- Both people have a sincere desire to be with one another and to listen.
- Each person trusts that what is shared will be held in confidence.
- Authentic mutual commitment is seen as two people share and interact.

Three foundational processes for Intentional Dialogue and Active Listening:

- Mirroring – we set aside what we know, think, believe, or feel in order to totally tune into what another person shares.
- Validation – we communicate to the other person that we have heard and received what she or he shared.
- Empathy – we reflect back to the person our care and understanding for his or her ideas, opinions, beliefs, feelings, or information shared.



Skills & Tips for Intentional Dialogue and Active Listening

Truly being deeply heard and understood seems to be a rare occasion in the hurry-up or prideful age we are living in. Skills and tips we will strive to learn and practice with one another can be summarized as three basic parts to active listening:

Fully Pay Attention to Other Person

Give solid eye contact.

Do not interrupt.

Push aside your ideas, needs, similar experiences, agendas, or possible advice.

Ask Sincere Open-Ended or Clarifying Questions

Questions posed to help you better “hear” and understand what the person shares.

Questions to invite deeper sharing or elaboration by the other person.

Questions to help you better clarify you “heard” what the person shares.

Time to Reflect With Partner

Validation statements to say “I truly heard you.”

Empathy statement to reflect understanding for person.

Statements to reflect back content and emotions shared.

Conclusion

Perhaps the most important single thing mentoring partners can do for one another is to genuinely “listen.” *Reach Out* believes that our individual personal growth and development as well as the quality of our many life relationships will be directly related to our investment, beliefs, and abilities to practice intentional dialogue and active listening skills.

Intentional dialogue and active listening require commitment both to ourselves and to others. Embracing these skills and attributes takes practice and hard work! Too often, we just do not listen to and hear other people. We are in a hurry and have places to go and people to see. We make assumptions about what we think someone else feels, believes, knows, or experiences. We interrupt or allow interruptions when we have pledged to listen and really be present and engaged with someone. Consider how we keep cell phones on and take calls when we are having lunch with someone or taking a walk with a friend.

Self-absorption and pride also get in the way of really hearing, understanding and valuing someone else. All too often we want to tell others what to do, think, believe, or

feel. How often do we take a stance of being cocky and thinking we “know” just about everything and anything that another person should know and do on our say-so!

The bottom line is that successful mentoring partners practice effective communication skills. Each person needs to set him or herself aside when listening to the other. Then we are able to embrace, accept, respect and learn from one another. When we pay attention to someone, we demonstrate we value him or her. Trust builds and close relationships grow when we can openly and freely express personal fears, joys, hopes, dreams, feelings, struggles, disappointments and heartaches.

Investing in another person requires great maturity. We put ourselves aside to fully be present and to care about the other person. Underlying this kind of serious commitment to one another rests our *Reach Out* belief that every single person is precious, gifted and talented, and has a destiny! No wonder we strive to authentically get to know others!



Reach Out!

Worksheet: *Intentional Dialogue & Active Listening*

Name: _____ Date: _____

Partner: _____

1. Who is a person you are close to that inspires you?
2. Jot down notes on what you know about this person in terms of his or her ...
 - Personal hobbies, interests, or recreational activities.
 - Personal life struggles, pain, heartaches, or poor choices in life.
 - Personal hopes, dreams, or passions.
3. Think about the times when you and this person spend time together sharing ideas, beliefs, information or feelings.

Check the principles of intentional dialogue and active listening that you practice when you are together.

- ___ We fully listen to one another.
- ___ We are patient with one another.
- ___ We both sincerely desire to be with each other and to listen.
- ___ We trust that what we share will be held in confidence.
- ___ We are mutually committed to and invest time in our relationship.

4. Reflect and share which principle(s) you want to work on this year for other relationships in your life.