

# New Places for New People

Starting new Christian  
communities:  
A practical guide

## Chapter 15

How to Listen

# How to Listen

Listening is a vital skill and a core practice in forming relationships as the New Place for New People (NPNP) develops. As you listen, always be clear and honest about who you are as an NPNP and share how and why listening is an important and consistent part of your practice. From the beginning, plan how you will listen to the wider community as a regular part of your activities (see page 59 for more on connecting with the wider community).

## We listen to...

- value one another
- hear different voices and opinions
- learn about others
- hear their hopes, dreams, fears, and challenges
- hear what concerns people have
- hear what people are proud of
- form and develop relationships
- break down perceived stereotypes and barriers between people.

## Where to listen:

- in the places people meet and gather: leisure centres, cafés, coffee shops, school gates, parks, community spaces, social media groups, community online forums, local interest gatherings, public noticeboards, etc
- while joining in with a community activity
- while volunteering for a charity or a foodbank
- while hosting an event (why not host an event where the sole purpose is to listen to those gathered, eg to discuss an issue of concern? Or host an event on behalf of a local group or club).

## Examples of what good listening could look like

- Some pioneering team members visit a local school and listen to the headteacher. This leads to offering a free pop-up café outside the school, as parents wait to collect their children. Relationships are built and this leads to parents sharing their concerns and hopes for their local community.
- Each person in the pioneering team invites a small group of unaffiliated friends to a pub, café, etc to ask questions about their hopes for the community. The pioneering team members then write down what they have heard and share the combined observations with the rest of the pioneering team.
- The pioneering team commits to community litter picking every Saturday and to gathering afterwards in a local café to listen and ask questions (see examples

below). From the connections made, they invite the whole community to an event later in the month where the pioneering team share the key things they've heard from the community and ask the community what they might all do together to respond.

## Listening to a community group by hosting an event

Be clear and honest about who you are and why you are hosting the event. Identify a shared concern or issue arising from the community/context and try to keep people focused on that without going off-topic.

Depending on the context, and how formal the event is, it might be helpful to set some guidance around listening well to each other, such as:

- Agreeing to be open to different opinions.
- Agreeing that only one person will speak at a time.
- Agreeing that everyone will participate.

After setting guidance, the three key elements for successful listening are: participation, positive questioning, and reflection.

### 1. Think about participation:

- How easy is it for people to contribute? (When listening to a group of people, provide several ways for people to respond, eg flipcharts, graffiti walls, smiley charts).
- How diverse are the people gathered?
- How will you notice who has not contributed?
- Recognise who holds the power in a conversation due to their position, relationships, experience, knowledge, or access to resources.
- Remember to be attentive to quieter voices.

### 2. Ask positive questions, such as:

- What do you enjoy about living here?
- What are you proud of?
- What is needed?
- What would help the well-being of the community?

### 3. Reflect on what you are hearing from your community:

- Build into your core leadership team meetings a space to share what you are hearing and noticing in your community.
- What patterns are emerging?
- What are you learning?
- What might God be saying to you?

## How to listen well

- Be attentive to the words used.
- Notice the volume and tone of the words.
- Try to recognise and suspend your own assumptions and judgements.
- Notice the emotions expressed by the person speaking.
- When someone pauses and is silent, avoid rushing to fill the space.
- Notice the body language; is the person relaxed or apprehensive?
- What remains unspoken and seems to be unmentionable (the elephant in the room)?
- Notice when something upsets you, or surprises you, and focus on listening rather than your own response.
- Listen with the aim of understanding the other person.
- Use 'I' language when responding to someone.
- Honour confidentiality.
- Ask open-ended questions.

## Signs you may not be listening well

- You are busy thinking of your response.
- You recognise yourself thinking, 'that's good, that's bad'.
- Fidgeting, tapping your fingers, glancing at your watch.
- Avoiding eye contact.
- Thinking about something else (your next meal!)
- You constantly feel the urge to interrupt.
- You bring the conversation back to you!
- You don't ask any questions.
- You quickly become defensive and want to speak.
- Your body language is closed and defensive.
- You forget the name of the person you are talking to.



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