

# *Hard Discussions Need a Tender Heart:*

## Tools to Listen Well and Communicate Effectively

Learning Outcomes:

- After participation in the program, Sisters will:
  - Discover skills they can use to actively listen to opinions and beliefs that are contrary to their own view points.
  - Practice ways to articulate and convey their own viewpoints.
  - Identify when to walk away from a conversation.

Supplies:

- PowerPoint Slideshow
  - Download the correct fonts (so everything matches!)
    - You can find them in the Alpha Xi Delta Branding and Graphics Folder in Exclusively Xi's Resource Center. The file is titled "Fonts"
    - The three fonts you'll need are called:
      - *Ciao Bella*
      - **Crimson Text**
      - **Montserrat**
- Computer with camera and mic
- Access to video conference platform (example: Zoom, Google Hangout, etc.) with breakout room capabilities
- Pen and paper or Word document
- Timer

Notes:

- If in the script it says "(slide)" you should move to the next slide in the deck (slide images are also in the left column for reference). If the script says "(advance)" it indicates animation within the same slide.
- It is recommended that, if virtual, you use a platform that allows Sisters to see your screen (for the slide) but also allows them to see you and each other. Don't be afraid to stop sharing your screen when there's a discussion so it feels more personal!

Key:

Content

Questions for participation

*Notes for facilitator*

# Welcome and Introduction

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REALIZE YOUR POTENTIAL

Hard Discussions Need a Tender Heart:  
Tools to Listen Well and Communicate Effectively

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Empathy is defined as  
"the action of  
understanding, being  
aware of, being sensitive  
to, and vicariously  
experiencing the  
feelings, thoughts, and  
experiences of another."

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*(slide) Welcome Sisters, thank them for attending the program and introduce yourself.*

We are coming off an election year, there is a social reckoning and awakening and the world is in the midst of a pandemic. None of this is news to any of us. To top it off, social media gives everyone a platform to share their thoughts. These broad topics bring up a range of feelings and thoughts for each of us, but what about when someone else's opinions don't match our own? Do we have the skills to listen well? To not escalate? And how to evaluate when it's appropriate to walk away?

This program will address ways in which listening can help you gain a better understanding of another point of view, as well as help you convey your own. It will also give you indicators as to when you should call it quits and walk away.

To get us started, we are going to do a centering exercise to ensure that we are all here in this present moment. We might have roommates or parents or animals moving around us, so I want to challenge all of us to remain as engaged and focused as possible for the next 45 minutes.

*(slide) I'm going to set a timer for one minute, and during this minute I want you to reflect on a time that someone showed you empathy. Empathy is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experienced of another. You can reflect on this in your head or write it down on a notepad or word document. When reflecting on this experience, think about: How did this person go about showing you empathy? Why is it that empathy was something you needed in that moment? And lastly, how would have the outcome of the interaction been different if the person had not shown you empathy?*

*Set timer for one minute and thank participants for reflecting after the minute is up. Then ask for at least 5*

*Sisters to unmute themselves and share out their empathy related experiences to the entire group.*

15/20

## Active Listening

We are all coming to this program with different life experiences, beliefs and lenses through which we view the world. With that, we can never fully understand where someone is coming from because there is so much we don't know about others and haven't experienced. In order to engage in these meaningful and often difficult conversations, we must be willing to practice and give empathy. We also must acknowledge that we can never know all of the experiences someone else has had. This is where a tender heart comes in, by that, we mean approaching conversations with empathy and being ready to listen.

A crucial component of engaging in difficult conversations with a tender heart is practicing active listening. (slide) Active listening includes focusing attention on the speaker where you are listening while simultaneously providing verbal and non-verbal cues (such as head nods). You have probably heard the phrase "listen to hear instead of listen to respond," and this is what we mean when we use the words "active listening."

Take a moment and click the raise your hand reaction or put a message in the chat box if you have ever been in a discussion with someone and you could tell they weren't listening to you. (slide) You were aware that they were just trying to build their argument in their head. In the chat, list what some of the indicators were—how did you know they weren't actually listening to hear you?

*Read the responses as they come in and provide affirmation.*

Thank you all for responding. Can I have a few Sisters verbally share out how they felt when they noticed the person wasn't even listening to them? *Solicit responses.*

(Slide) Listening to respond is something that I've even been guilty of doing. In Brene Brown's *Braving the Wilderness* chapter on "People are hard to hate up close.

### Active Listening Includes:

1. Focusing attention on the speaker
2. Simultaneously providing verbal and non-verbal cues (such as head nods)
3. Listening to hear instead of listening to respond

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How does it feel to talk to someone that's not listening?



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"We have to listen to understand in the same way we want to be understood."

-Brene Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*



Your body language communicates your willingness to engage in conversations with a tender heart or not.



Move in," Brene notes. "We have to listen to understand in the same way we want to be understood."

*Pause to let thought sink in with participants then repeat line for effect.*

"We have to listen to understand in the same way we want to be understood." We all have beliefs, ideas and opinions that we want to share, and unless we come into difficult discussions with the idea that we both want to share and truly listen, we will not be engaging in conversations with a tender heart. (slide)

Body language is a big part of this. How you physically hold yourself can communicate a lot about your openness, or not. What are some cues that indicate we are listening? What might this body language look like via video chat? Please put your thoughts in the chat.

*Read the responses as they come in and provide affirmation. Include the following if Sisters don't come up with them on their own:*

- *Body facing one another, not turned to the side*
- *Leaning in towards the person speaking*
- *Relaxed jaw, face and shoulders*
- *Open body language (so arms not folded across chest, etc.)*
- *Eye contact*

15/35

## Articulating Your Own Viewpoints

Articulate Your Own Viewpoints



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(Slide) Now that we have gone over some points on how to be better listeners, we are going to learn how we can articulate our own thoughts and viewpoints.

When thinking back to what we just learned about active listening, we shouldn't be building our counterpoints as the other person in speaking—remember, listen with a tender heart! When and if you have an opportunity to share your thoughts and ideas, a great habit to adopt

## Utilizing I-statements



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could be taking a full deep breath before responding. This breath allows you to calm your nervous system responses, while also allowing you to continue moving forward with a clear mind.

(Slide) Additionally, when crafting what ideas you want to share, reflect on your experiences and utilize “I-statements” Versus “you-statements.” I- statements allow us to make it clear to the other person that you are speaking for yourself with a focus on your own experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs and not on beliefs or judgments you may have about the other person. Statements that begin with “you,” “you always,” and “you are,” can often make broad generalizations of who that person is and leave them feeling judged or disengaged from the conversation. Let me give you an example of how an I-statement versus a you-statement could be used. Let’s say Jodi is talking to Cassandra. Cassandra shares that she chooses not to vote. This causes Jodi to start to feel upset, because she really values voting and wants every woman’s voice to be heard. She could use a “you statement”: “You don’t vote? Women make up a little over half the U.S. population! You choosing not to vote hinders women’s progress.” See how that was more of a reflection on the other person, Cassandra, versus Jodi’s thoughts/feelings? Here’s how she could share her thoughts using an “I-statement”: “I feel strongly that all women 18 and older should vote in every election, small and large, since we make up a little over half the U.S. population, we can make a big impact.” See the difference between the two? Jodi was still able to share her thoughts, but by using an “I-statement”, it allowed for the conversation to remain in an open place for further discussion.

## Debate vs. Dialogue

Debate	Dialogue
Assumes there is one right answer (one person is right)	Assumes others have pieces of an answer and we can work together together
Wants a winner, competing to prove the other side wrong	Wants a collaboration, seeks to find common understanding
Listeners feel threatened and defensive	Listeners understand
Listeners only feel their position	Collapses all views, including your own
Defends your own view of all costs	Allows others thinking to improve your own
Reinforces existing differences	Reinforces reasons for being engaged
Creates a control/feel and strategies rather connection	Creates an open and being the high open for further discussion
Hardline or hostile or feelings often already leading to hostile or offend	Hardline not present for the other. Doesn't already seek to threaten or offend

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(Slide) It is easy for hard discussions to escalate to a heated debate. Holiday Phillips has created a wonderful resource on Debate vs. Dialogue. For this program, our focus is on how to create open dialogue. Let’s take a moment to read over her table on Debate vs. Dialogue.

*Pause and give time for participants to read through the table.*

### Tips for de-escalating include:

1. Softening body language
2. Asking for a break
3. Saying "I need a moment to calm down."

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### Why (or why not) are pre-recording lectures better than in person classes?

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I am going to point out a few key points. According to Holiday Phillips, dialogue “assumes others have pieces of an answer and you can craft a solution together [and that the] style is collaborative, [which] seeks to find common understanding.” If we can shift our mindset away from one person having the right or wrong answer, then we can take a more collaborative and empathetic approach to our hard discussions.

(Slide) If you ever feel that the discussion is escalating, some tips to de-escalate the situation include changing and softening your body language or even asking for a break. It is okay to say “I need a moment to calm down, catch my breath” or even ask “Can we regroup in a moment or two?”

Now I’m going to sort you into randomly generated breakout rooms. In the breakout rooms, I’d like for you to select two people to have a discussion about (Slide): Why (or why not) are pre-recorded lectures better than in person classes? One Sister needs to take one side and the other Sister needs to take the other side of the discussion. If you are not one of the two Sisters in the discussion, you will be tasked with observing and taking notes on the discussion. Make notes on whether active listening is taking place, examples of moments the Sisters show empathy towards each other, usage of “I-statements” and anything else noteworthy. I am giving you four minutes in your breakout room.

*Set timer for four minutes and send Sisters to breakout rooms.*

Thank you for participating in our mock difficult discussions. Can I have a few Sisters that were observing share out some of what they saw?

Now, can I have a Sister that was participating in the discussion describe how it felt if your partner did a great job at utilizing active listening? What did your partner do that proved to you that they were hearing you out versus just trying to build their own case?

5/40

# When to Disengage

Hard discussions can take a toll on all of us. Growth does happen when we push ourselves outside of our comfort zones, however it is important to remember that we all have boundaries and that all of our boundaries are different. We have to know our own boundaries before engaging in these hard conversations.

You do not have to listen to someone who is endangering your mental or physical wellbeing. If you feel unsafe, exit the conversation with whatever means necessary. [\(Slide\)](#)

This may look like:

### Opportunities to disengage include when a person:

- Physically makes themselves appear bigger or enter into your personal space.
- Says or implies you are less than because of your identity.
- Flat out threatens to harm you.
- Saying they believe in a racial power structure.



- A person physically making themselves appear bigger or entering into your personal space.
- A person saying or implying that you are less than because of your identity.
- A person flat out threatening to harm you.
- A person saying they believe in a racial power structure.

This is by no means an exhaustive list. You must determine what your boundaries are and what difficult, yet safe conversations look like for you. Having a tender heart does not mean you let yours get trampled on, but only you can know what that looks like.

5/45

# Closing

We covered a lot today. We discussed what it looks like to have a tender heart in difficult conversations. We learned how to listen to understand instead of listening to respond. We were able articulate our own viewpoints and ways which we can continue formulating these thoughts. We also learned to acknowledge our boundaries and when to disengage from a dangerous conversation. Whew!

Remember our goal for engaging with hard conversations with a tender heart is to learn more about the other person's perspective, share our own perspective and work to find common understanding. Hopefully through practicing active listening and engaging in difficult



Thank you!

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conversations, we leave these conversations understanding each other a little bit more than we had before.

Before we wrap up, I'd like to have some Sisters share out their key takeaways from the program or one skill they are committing to using in future hard discussions? Solicit responses.

(Slide) Thank you for taking the time share your key takeaways and for participating with us today.