



# Hard Discussions Need a Tender Heart:

## Tools to Listen Well and Communicate Effectively

### Learning Outcomes:

- Sisters will discover skills they can use to actively listen to opinions and beliefs that are contrary to their own viewpoints.
- Sisters will practice ways to articulate and convey their own viewpoints.
- Sisters will identify when to walk away from a conversation.

### Supplies:

- Scratch paper and writing utensil
- Timer
- Slide deck
- Microphone if needed for the size of the space

### Facilitation notes:

- Facilitation Key:
  - *Items in italics are notes for the facilitator*
  - **Items in highlighted in gray are questions the facilitator should pose to the group**
  - Items in regular font should be shared with the participants, but not necessarily read verbatim. The facilitator can put them in her own words to make it conversational.
- The left-hand column below gives you lots of information! The images are the corresponding slides to what is listed in that section of the written content. The numbers (example "5/5" or "5/10") refer to timing. The number to the left of the slash indicates the amount of time that section should take to facilitate. The number to the right of the slash is the total amount of time that will have elapsed by the end of that section.
- *(Slide)* indicates that the PowerPoint should be advanced. Make sure you review the slides along with the facilitation guide in preparation for the program. Sometimes *(Slide) or (Advance)* advances to the next, and sometimes it starts animation within the same slide.

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| <p>5/5</p>  | <h2 style="text-align: center;">Welcome and Introduction</h2>  |
|  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hard Discussion Need a Tender Heart:</i><br/>Tools to Listen Well and Communicate Effectively</p> | <p>Hello and welcome! <i>Depending on the level of familiarity with the group, introduce yourself and share a little bit about your background.</i></p> <p>This program was created as part of Alpha Xi Delta Votes, an initiative to help our members feel confident and have the tools needed to be civically engaged, feel connected to others and to learn about their resources and stay up-to-day on local and national elections.</p> |

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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Election years can be an intense, and often divisive time, in our communities. 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 someone else's point of view, as well as strategies to help you convey your own. It will also give you indicators as to when you should call it quits and walk away from a potentially harmful conversation.

To get us started, we are going to do a centering exercise to ensure that we are all here in this present moment. We all have many outside priorities, including exams, assignments, jobs, and much more, but 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 three minutes, and during this time 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 experiences of another. You can reflect on this in your head, write it down on a piece of scratch paper, or as a note on your phone. 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 three minutes and thank participants for reflecting after the time is up. Then ask for a few Sisters to share out their empathy related experiences to the entire group.*

# Active Listening

We are all coming to this program with different lived 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 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 care and being ready to listen.

## 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



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 and affirmations. 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."

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



Take a moment and consider 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. **What are some of the indicators they weren't actively listening?**

*Have Sisters shout out their answers and provide affirmation.*

Thank you for sharing.

(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. 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."

-Brene Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*



"We have to listen to understand in the same way we want to be understood." We all have beliefs, ideas and opinions

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



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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?**

*Solicit responses from Sisters. 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 (arms not folded across chest, etc.)
- Eye contact

Great job, Sisters!

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 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.

Utilizing I-statements



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(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 Andrea is talking to Marissa. Marissa shares that she chooses not to vote. This causes Andrea 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, Marissa, versus Andrea'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? Andrea 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 that you are right and the other person is wrong. | Assumes that both people have pieces of the answer and you can craft a solution together. |
| Focuses on winning and losing.                            | Focuses on understanding and learning from each other.                                    |
| Often involves personal attacks.                          | Often involves respectful and constructive feedback.                                      |
| Often involves a lot of "I" statements.                   | Often involves a lot of "we" statements.  |
| Often involves a lot of "you" statements.                 | Often involves a lot of "I" statements.   |
| Often involves a lot of "I" statements.                   | Often involves a lot of "we" statements.  |
| Often involves a lot of "I" statements.                   | Often involves a lot of "we" statements.  |



(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."



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?”

5/40

# When to Disengage

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.



Hard discussions can take a toll on all of us. Growth happens when we push ourselves outside of our comfort zones, however it is important to remember that we all have boundaries and that each 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 or that the environment could become harmful, it is important that you exit the conversation with whatever means necessary. (Slide) Examples of unsafe conversations may look like:

- 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



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learned to acknowledge our boundaries and when to disengage from a dangerous conversation.

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 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 4-5 responses.*

*(Slide)* We did some excellent work here today, Sisters! Thank you for taking the time share your key takeaways and for participating with us to share.