

Women's Circle Workbook



Practices to Increase Self-awareness
&
Self-acceptance



Dawnette Hale

Organizational Leadership—Servant Leader master's capstone

Gonzaga University

Part Two of Three

Purpose

This workbook is to serve the women at DTNA by creating an opportunity to come together and find support, shared understandings, and to increase relationship skills that may transform their lives and the lives of those, they serve.



Believe

Art by Dawnette Hale



Table of Contents

Part One

Silence – an individual exploration into mindfulness

Meditation practice tips and examples

Lectio Divina

Journal prompts

Part Two

Listening – being present for self and others

Intentional listening

Inquiry—the clarifying questions

Journal prompts

Dialogue – a space of growth and change

Advocacy—clarify our understandings to others

Dealing with the uncomfortable: power shifts, being right, mental models, defensiveness, discomfort

Journal prompts

Part Three

Moving towards a brighter future - Imagination

Visualizing a new future—the integration of silence, listening, and dialogue

Dream life – art project

Journal prompts

Tools



References

Listening – being present for others

Intentional listening – bringing mindfulness to the present

Guidelines

Boundaries

Feelings

Preparation for listening

Inquiry—the clarifying questions

Journal prompts



Requirements of this section

- ❖ Meditate in silence for 10 minutes each day.
- ❖ Prepare yourself before engaging in intentional listening
- ❖ Engage in an active listening exercise with a partner for 10-15 minutes - a minimum of once a week.
- ❖ Journal daily using the prompts or write from what is in your heart



Listening being present for others

Intentional listening – bringing mindfulness to the present

Intentional listening or active listening is a learning space that many people are exploring. There are videos, podcasts, and books on the benefits of mindful listening. Listening is a pathway to developing greater trust, brings clarity when problem-solving, and offers profound insights into the feelings and decisions of others and ourselves. Our ability to listen determines the depth of intimacy we may experience in our relationships. Our inability to listen keeps us tied to the past, preventing us from being present and moving forward. We may lack key insights, which support the transformation of ourselves and others, making our communities into more loving, compassionate, and respectful spaces.

Guidelines

Before we begin on, conversational prompt supportive of intentional listening; there are a few guidelines that need to be understood.



Boundaries

It is important to have personal boundaries and rules for self-care when entering a space of intentional listening. No two people are the same, and usually, people see topics differently, and they care about different elements with greater or lesser passion.

Boundaries are supportive of participating in a listening space and feeling safe enough to continue in a challenging conversation when

emotions are engaged. If the circumstances do not feel safe, then it is important to take a break. We do not stay engaged when the space does not feel safe.

Life and death situations such as medical emergencies with family members require being present when we do not feel safe. The daily work done in intentional listening can be supportive of being present in the critical moments in our lives.



Feelings

Listening brings up feelings.

The feelings that we experience while listening belongs to us. Our feelings are never the responsibility of someone else. It is important to be present in conversations and manage the moments when our feelings alter our listening abilities. This is an indication that is a good time to pause and refocus, clarify a comment, and double-check on the intention of the speaker.



It is reasonable to share that you do not feel comfortable with the topic. *You will decide what you feel comfortable discussing.* You are not a therapist who has received years of training and who have been guided on how to have difficult conversations. This is an exploration of mindful listening, and you are coming from a place of compassion, caring, and patience. You also are expecting not to be overwhelmed by your feelings to the point where you cannot listen anymore.

If you need a break or to ask that the process can go a bit slower to help with you stay in a listening mode, do so. If someone trusts you enough to share their feelings and thoughts, then you are allowed to be yourself and bring your best to the experience. If someone is forcing their opinion on you and you are not allowed to share your insights or ask questions, this is not a healthy space. To change a toxic space requires much listening, and you may need to seek help before continuing.



Preparation for Listening

There are reasons we do not listen to others. There may be times when we have negative feelings, including blame, shame, embarrassment, fear, frustration, and confusion that we do not know how to manage. We may also be aware that we will be listening to someone share their feelings about their disappointment, sadness, and perhaps anger with a situation. We may be concerned that we cannot manage our feelings on critical topics that are to be discussed. The idea of listening and experiencing strong feelings can be overwhelming. It is important to prepare yourself for listening.

This workbook is designed for you to practice listening. The more you practice listening, the more you can cope with your feelings and being present to another person's experiences.

You can practice listening in any space – the office, your home, the grocery store, the dentist's office. I recommend that you find a partner who is also interested in developing their listening skills. There are a few things to keep in mind while you explore intentional or active listening.



- ❖ Listening is not being completely silent.
- ❖ You may make affirmative or negative noise to indicate you understand.
- ❖ Pay close attention to vocal tone and body language – many people convey the strength of their emotions through body language and tone.
- ❖ It is okay to ask questions, but the questions need to be to clarify your understanding.
- ❖ It is important to remember that questions are not demands or attacks
- ❖ Do think carefully before asking a question. The intention is not to have the speaker defend themselves, but to share information.
- ❖ Remember that you are practicing and developing a new skill. Be patient with yourself while you learn.

To understand more about listening skills, I recommend reading Madelyn Burley-Allen's book *Listening: The forgotten skill*; it is an amazing resource.

Inquiry—clarifying questions

It is beneficial to practice listening in non-threatening situations. Like any skill, the beginning phase can be rough, and it becomes smoother with practice. I recommend practicing with someone with whom you enjoy a positive relationship – a trusted friend or family member.

A conversational prompt is used when you want to encourage someone to share more of their story. These are phrases that show your interest in listening to them and understanding their point of view. Below I have included some of the questions Gene Thompson-Grove and Edorah Frazer compiled in the “Pocket Guide to Probing Questions” (n.d.). The Tool section includes Dennis Connor’s suggested processes and questions for inquiry and advocacy.

Inquiry Prompts

- ❖ Can you tell me more about that?
- ❖ What do you feel is right?
- ❖ What’s another way you might...?
- ❖ How is...different from...?
- ❖ When have you done/experienced something like this before? What does this remind you of?
- ❖ What was your intention when...?
- ❖ What surprises you about...? Why are you surprised?
- ❖ What is the best thing that could happen?
- ❖ What are you most afraid will happen?
- ❖ What do you/I need to ask to understand better?
- ❖ How do you feel when...? What might this tell you about...?



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- ❖ Engage in an active listening exercise using inquiry prompts with a partner for 10-15 minutes - a minimum of once a week.
- ❖ Journal using the prompts or write from what is in your heart



Umbel and purple moth – Mount Hood, Oregon

Listening Journal Prompts

You may select a prompt or write from what is in your heart. Please write for 5 minutes.



What do I need to do to listen?

Why did I stop listening when they told me...? Who or what experience(s) taught me this? What can I do instead?

Did I ask enough questions? What questions could I have asked?

If I had been silent, would they have felt able to manage?

Am I trying to save someone from painful lessons I have learned?

If I listen, will they develop their own plan to save themselves?

Do I know how important people in my life feel about how I listen to them?

Who do I listen to? Does listening to them help me have strong, loving, compassionate relationships?

Would my family/friends tell me if they thought I was too dominating?

Would my family/friends tell me if they thought I need stronger boundaries?

What will happen if I ask them to share their feedback? Will I listen or become defensive?

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A stylized drawing of a flower with red and yellow petals. The flower has five petals, with the center being a bright yellow and the outer edges being a vibrant red. The drawing is simple and graphic, with bold outlines and flat colors.

[illegible]

A drawing of a flower with red and yellow petals. The flower has five petals, with the center being yellow and the outer edges being red. The drawing is done in a simple, sketchy style.



A drawing of a flower with red and yellow petals. The flower has five petals, with the center being yellow and the outer edges being red. The drawing is done in a simple, sketchy style with visible pencil or crayon strokes.





My Journal – What I heard



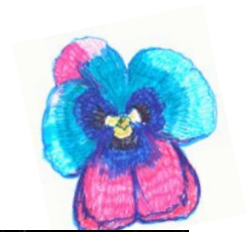
Dialogue – a space of growth and change

Advocacy—clarify to others our understandings

Ladder of Inference

Dealing with uncomfortable feelings

Journal prompts



Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Requirements of this section

- ❖ Meditate in silence for 10 minutes each day.
- ❖ Practice dialogue skills - Work with a partner twice a week
- ❖ Journal daily using the prompts or write from what is in your heart

Dialogue – a space of growth and change

We now reach the place in our mindfulness learning journey, where we begin to use our voices to share our perspectives and ideas. Many times, women are silenced or spoken over, and it is important to build the inner resources to hold a space for being calm and focused. From this space, we practice listening deeply to people to understand their unique perspectives and offer a compassionate space for growth. By listening and not offering solutions, we begin to learn about more of our conscious biases and expectations because nobody behaves and thinks just like we do. Hopefully, we learned about new ideas and found more things that are similar between us than are different.

At the beginning of the journey, we explored silence through meditation, readings, and journaling. We selected readings to study that aligned with our curiosity. Perhaps we had an opportunity to identify our tribe. Next, we used journaling to challenge our thinking about how we see ourselves and how others see us.

We have practiced listening and using inquiry skills to have a deeper understanding of others. We might even have noticed behaviors that kept us from connecting to others as we reflected on listening and not offering solutions.



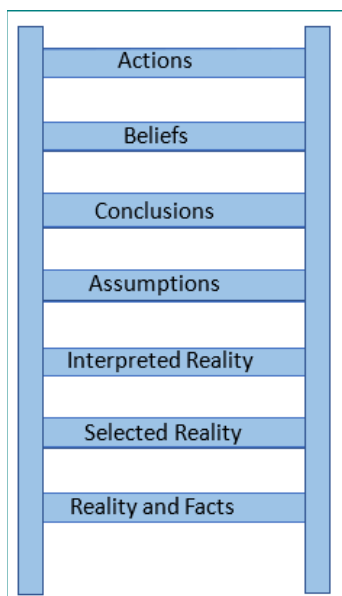
Dialogue is the space we hope to enter. It is a respectful engagement to listen with care and concern to one another and using inquiry and advocacy skills to reach new understandings. Dialogue is not a confrontation – there is no winner. This is an

intimate space where trust is a necessary element. Let's begin to explore the space for speaking to understand and to connect.

Advocacy—clarify to others our understandings

Advocacy is the process of sharing our insights and how we reached our conclusions. We are stating a position we support. We are able to respond to questions providing details on the source of our information which facts we selected, some of our experiences that support our thoughts, and then our conclusions. In dialogue, we can ask other people if they can understand our thoughts and if it makes sense to them.

To advocate for a position in a dialogue process requires being responsible and mindful of our thought patterns and examining our assumptions. Sometimes we repeat thoughts we heard from adults when we were children. Sometimes we learn something from a textbook or a media source, but the information is inaccurate. It is important to invest time in reviewing how we reached our conclusions and actions. One method for testing our thinking is Chris Argyris' Ladder of Inference (1993).



The ladder of inference is the unconscious process we use to reach decisions, form beliefs, and generate actions. By understanding the rungs of the ladder, we can stop ourselves from answering from what our brain makes available quickly from unconscious bias and mental models.

When we are aware of the pitfalls of defaulting of old patterns, we can create new outcomes mindfully.

The ladder of inference shows us the automated processes we have to challenge to be present to experience dialogue. The first challenges are to look at the data that is available for us to use to reach decisions and which pieces of information we select to help form our views. The second challenge is our life experiences have created assumptions – filters about the data that automatically plays in our minds. These are our mental models and unconscious biases. Our mental models lead us to reach conclusions, form our beliefs, and act. This is the mental system that favors repeating the same behavior over and over again in a reflexive loop.

It is important to ask ourselves questions when we are ready to make statements with surety in a position.

Questions to help us challenge reflexive loop thinking:

What are the sources of the data?

Why did I select my sources and not select the other sources?

What elements from the data source(s) did I select to support my idea?

What do I assume? Why did I assume this? Did I hear this as a young person? Did someone I respect tell me this? Is it still true?

Am I drawing the right conclusion?

Is my conclusion based on trustworthy facts?

Why do I think this is the right thing to do?

Can I do this differently?



Dealing with uncomfortable feelings

One of the most difficult parts I have learned to become comfortable with is that dialogue requires me to acknowledge when I missed information or did not ask enough questions to understand a position fully. I also need to be able to change my position when I learn facts and gain insights from a new perspective.

A few of the options for managing the discomfort:

Sharing your feelings and asking for a bit of time to consider the new insights. This is possible in dialogue when it is not possible when we are in conflict. Dialogue is an intentional learning space – each person is bringing their best to the moment. An argument is usually emotionally charged and operating in a space of fear and anger. Arguments do not allow us to bring our best to the moment.

Take a break from speaking, and ask the other person to share a bit more about their insights. Just because we realize that our thinking needs a reboot does not mean that everything we hear in dialogue is something we will bring into our lives. But it can be soothing to listen to someone confident in their thoughts, beliefs, and actions.

We are learning. It is a good idea to remind ourselves that dialogue is a learning space. The more we can be present in a learning space, the less our feelings can hijack us into reacting. I like to remind myself that I can make mistakes because I am always learning, and nothing has been perfected.

Requirements of this section

- ❖ Meditate in silence for 10 minutes each day.
- ❖ Practice dialogue skills - Work with a partner twice a week.
Select a topic and use the Ladder of inference to identify how you came to your beliefs. Share your discoveries.
- ❖ Journal daily using the prompts or write from what is in your heart



Walden Pond, Concord, Massachusetts

Dialogue Journal Prompts

You may select a prompt or write from what is in your heart. Please write for 5 minutes.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Who would make a wonderful, trustworthy confidant? Why?

I appreciate ... being in my life

LEARNING

What did I learn today?

I am thankful that I learned...

When will I learn...?

What am I going to do different today?

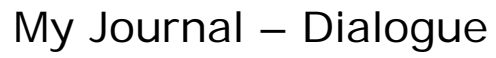
FEELINGS

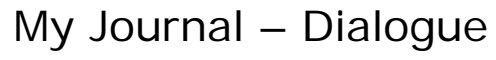
I made a mistake, so I...

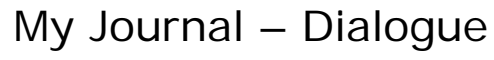
When will I forgive...?

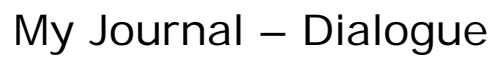
Do I need to still feel ... about ...?

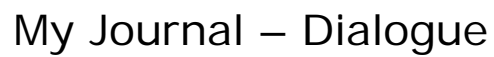


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End of Part Two