

COMMUNICATING BETTER



SESSION 3
HANDOUTS

SESSION 3

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Introduction

This session explores how we can communicate better when tensions and conflicts arise. The initial focus is on learning to show that we've listened to others, on the basis that when others feel heard, tensions are more likely to de-escalate and the chances of mutual understanding are enhanced. The conviction is that listening is a core life skill, and better and deeper listening is key to transforming conflict. The session then explores how we can speak in more effective ways, so that others can better receive what we're saying, especially when the temperature is raised.

Session Objectives

- To deepen participants' engagement with one another and the material through fun activities.
- To grasp the importance of respectful communication when tensions and conflicts arise.
- To develop skills in respectful communication, both as a listener and a speaker.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session participants will have:

- Grasped the value of *showing* that one has heard another person, and the limitations of simply *saying* one has heard the other.
- Practised paraphrasing and summarising another speaker, having noticed both the content (facts) and the tenor (feelings) of what they've heard.
- Listed some of the many benefits of summarising as a skill in inter-personal and group interactions.
- Practised sharing information about one's own feelings and perspective in times of tension without blaming or attacking others.
- Grasped the importance of articulating one's feelings and expression of impact, as well as underlying needs which were not met, when addressing a hurtful incident or situation.
- Considered appropriate timing and setting for difficult conversations, focusing on a time when emotions are able to be controlled and a space where participants feel safe.

Overview of Session Segments

Welcome:	Arrival and introduction to the session
Way in:	What do we mean when we say 'The issue is communication'?
Explore 1:	Listening exercise in pairs
Explore 2:	Listening: scripted role-play
Pointer 1:	Deliberate listening
Pointer 2:	Summarising and paraphrasing
Explore 3:	Deliberate listening practice
Explore 4:	Centred speaking: scripted role-play
Pointer 3:	Centred speaking
Explore 5:	Centred speaking practice
Pointer 4:	How communication is affected by emotional intensity
Review:	Looking back over the session
Feedback:	Completing written feedback

Handouts

Handout 1:	Introduction and overview of Session 3
Handout 2:	Deliberate listening
Handout 3:	Centred speaking
Handout 4:	Practising centred speaking
Handout 5:	Preparing for Session 4
Handout 6:	Feedback form for participants (for return to course leader)

DELIBERATE LISTENING

A Discipline and Skill



Listening is particularly important when the temperature is raised. When we are in disagreement or conflict with another person, listening helps us to avoid misunderstanding, and enables us to show respect for the other person. However, when feelings are running high, it is more difficult to listen well. So listening is a discipline, which we learn and keep practising.

Here are suggested steps for learning to listen in a more deliberate way.

1. Invite and allow the other person to speak.

Focus on being the listener. Show this by your eye contact, your posture, attitude and gestures. Make clear that you want to hear what the other person has to say. You might say: 'It would help me if I could understand how you see the situation.'

2. Press the internal pause button; and put your agenda on hold.

This is the most difficult step, but it's central to genuine listening. It means that you put on hold your thoughts, opinions, experiences – and your response: all these you put to one side. Focus your attention on listening to what the other person is saying. Suspend your judgements. Your task at this stage is simply to LISTEN.

3. Sum up what the other person says, at regular intervals.

Keep the focus on the speaker. 'So you feel...', 'You're saying that you...', 'You believe...'. Re-state what you have heard in your own words, *but keep it brief*. If you can, reflect both the speaker's *emotions* as you sensed them, as well as the *content of the words*.

A good paraphrase or summary shows the speaker that they've been listened to. It can:

- Enable the speaker to hear how they've conveyed their message (and to correct themselves if necessary).
- Permit you, the listener, to check that you've understood correctly (and allows the speaker to correct anything you've misheard).
- Give you some space to reflect, as opposed to just reacting.

4. Ask, 'Is there anything else you want to say?' or 'Is there more?'

This shows that you're really open to the other person. Sometimes the speaker won't share their deeper concern until you've proved that you're listening. Give the other person the space that they need. Remember to keep checking your understanding by paraphrasing: keep showing that you're committed to listening.

5. Wait for the invitation to express your view, or ask for permission to give your view.

Don't just leap in. Respect the other person: they may want a breathing space; they may not want to hear your views yet. It's better to wait for the moment when you will be listened to, or else your words may fall on deaf ears. So you could ask: 'Is now a good time to tell you how I see the issue?'

PRACTISING CHECKING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Work in Pairs

Speaker

- Identify a recent situation when you were somewhat upset or even angry with someone.
- Avoid really intense situations where talking about it might trigger you becoming overly emotional.
- So, on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) of emotional intensity, don't choose anything above a 4 or 5.
- You'll have just under five minutes to tell the story. Give your listener some spaces so that they can practise paraphrasing and summarising.

Listener

Focus on:

- Pressing the internal pause button and being a good listener.
- Checking your understanding by occasionally paraphrasing in your own words what the other has said.
- Towards the end, summarising the whole story.

Remember: this kind of deliberate listening can be transformative, but it must be perceived as genuine interest and not as technique. If your attitude and intention to listen are clear, this will show through, even if your skill is limited.

CENTRED SPEAKING



1. **Centred speaking comes from the heart**, the centre of ourselves.
2. **The focus of centred speaking is on giving information about myself**: my emotions, my needs, the impact of the situation on me, my preferences. We can also call this giving 'I messages'.
3. **Uncentred speaking focuses on 'you', and is characterised by blaming, demanding or mind-reading** (claiming to know the other's intentions). We can also call this giving 'you messages'.
4. **Centred speaking is hard**. It requires self-awareness (what exactly do I think and how do I feel about what is happening?), vulnerability (am I willing to reveal what is in my heart?) as well as careful thought and self-discipline.
5. **Other characteristics** of centred speaking include:
 - Taking responsibility for myself first of all.
 - Being specific, not generalised.
 - Not excusing my behaviour by pointing to the behaviour of others.

One Way to Speak in a Centred Way through Giving an 'I message'

- a. Focus on yourself and own your statement: **'I...'**
- b. Name your feeling or thought: **'I felt hurt...'** or **'I thought I was not treated with respect...'**
- c. Name the problem behaviour or action: **'I felt hurt when I was cut off from speaking in the meeting, and you moved onto the next item...'**
- d. Describe the impact on you: **'... because I thought I had an interesting idea which you seemed unwilling to listen to.'**
- e. State what you would have preferred: **'I would have preferred it if you had explained why it was not a good time to voice my idea.'**

To note: It's often better to think of these elements as ingredients to include in a conversation, rather than as elements that you have to combine into a fully formed single sentence.

EXPRESSING FEELINGS

A Risk and a Challenge

Expressing our feelings to others can seem risky, especially when in conflict. However, it can also have a powerful effect, allowing others to see us in a more human way: it provides information that can help others to understand us and our behaviour.

We're more used to expressing our ideas than our feelings. We often confuse expression of feelings with the expression of other things, such as:

- **Impressions and Thoughts: e.g. 'I feel that you aren't listening to me.'**
With this impression, the feelings can be clarified by asking. 'How do you feel if you're not being listened to?' You may feel sad, frustrated or angry – or even relieved in some cases!
- **Evaluations of Ourselves: e.g. 'I feel useless at this task.'**
'Useless' is an evaluation of ability. How would you feel if you thought you were useless at something? Perhaps discouraged or despairing.
- **Interpretations of Others' Behaviour: e.g. 'I feel manipulated by him.'**
'Manipulation' is my interpretation of the other's behaviour. If I interpreted his behaviour in this way, how might I feel? Annoyed or resentful? Amused in some cases? Other interpretations of behaviour confused with feelings include: attacked, betrayed, cheated, rejected, misunderstood, neglected, patronised, used.
- **Seeing Others as Causing Feelings: e.g. 'I feel annoyed by you.'**
Others' actions may be the trigger for our feelings, but of themselves they are never the cause. The cause is more likely an unmet basic need. So, 'I feel annoyed because I needed to be taken seriously,' may be accurate – and is probably shaped by past experience.

Confusion about our feelings can in part be overcome if we own our feelings, rather than blaming others for them, or thinking that they are responsible for our feelings.

Finding the Words to Express Feelings

Here are some ideas to help in expressing your feelings. You can use these ideas, and extend your vocabulary as you develop your confidence in being open with others.

WHEN NEEDS ARE MET

- Happy, cheerful, joyful, delighted, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, blissful, ecstatic.
- Pleased, appreciative, thankful, grateful, hopeful, proud, glad, overwhelmed.
- Comfortable, quiet, calm, composed, secure, contented, relaxed, peaceful, confident.
- Interested, curious, intrigued, optimistic, surprised, astonished, fascinated, amazed.
- Sensitive, friendly, touched, trusting, warm, loving.

WHEN NEEDS ARE UNMET

- Disappointed, unhappy, upset, hurt, sad, miserable, depressed.
- Concerned, anxious, nervous, worried, scared, frightened.
- Uncomfortable, uneasy, unsure, confused, surprised, shocked, overwhelmed.
- Frustrated, irritated, impatient, annoyed, angry, jealous, resentful, disgusted, furious.
- Lonely, withdrawn, bored, tired, helpless, embarrassed.

PRACTISING CENTRED SPEAKING



Work in Pairs

Practise giving a centred (assertive) response using I-messages, including stating positively what you would prefer. Write down elements of your response in the spaces given.

Situation 1

Your partner or house mate finds it difficult to say 'No' to people. As a result they are over-stretched and have missed either spending quality time with you and your children, or helping with household tasks (or both). You communicate your concerns by saying:

Situation 2

For the third time in as many months, a church leader has asked you, as you arrived for Sunday morning worship, to be responsible for several jobs (use your imagination to identify specific ones) after the service. You can help, again, but usually two different people take on these tasks, and are given at least a week's warning. You communicate your concern about this request to the leader by saying:

Situation 3

You're a member of your church's worship committee. There is pressure from some on the committee for next week's service to incorporate several new styles of song that they learnt at a recent conference, but which don't fit with styles usually used in your church. You're concerned that the musicians won't cope well with this without more opportunity to learn the styles and to be confident to lead them. You think the congregation will be able to receive them better if several styles are not all introduced at once. You express your concerns by saying:

PRACTISING CENTRED SPEAKING

Extras

Scenario 1

You have a colleague whom you find difficult to work with, because he's pernickety and obstructive when you want to take any new initiative. You're tempted to say: 'He's the most uncooperative person I've ever had to work with.' If you were to take a more centred approach you might say:

Scenario 2

Someone else in the church took your umbrella at the end of a service, and when you challenged them they said it was their umbrella. You're tempted to say: 'I can't believe that a real Christian would do something like this to someone else in the church.' If you were to take a more centred approach you might say:

Scenario 3

One of your friends in the church is unhappy with a change that's been made to the morning service time. He complains to you about it and says: 'Lots of other people in the church are upset, and agree with me.' If he were to take a more centred approach he might say:

Scenario 4

A friend is hurt because another member of the congregation came up to her after the service and was critical of the way she had led the intercessions. Your friend said to you: 'She's always bitching about other people, and now I've got it in the neck from her.' If she were to take a more centred approach she might say:

Scenario 5

In discussions during church council meetings, you have been getting annoyed with one of your fellow lay leaders who always agrees with the vicar, and tells you that they must be right if they're the vicar. You're tempted to call her a flatterer, without a mind of her own. If you were to take a more centred approach you might say:

PREPARING FOR SESSION 4



Identify an example from your experience of a disagreement between two people on an issue, where each one has been clear (but not necessarily strong or strident) in their opposing positions.

The situation may be active or resolved. It might be from a home, work or church setting.

Choose something relatively straightforward, rather than something too complex or difficult. Examples of suitable disagreements would include:

- One partner wants to go on a beach holiday in the sun, while the other wants to go on a city holiday visiting sights and museums.
- One member of the worship team wants to conclude next Sunday's service with a traditional hymn, while another member of the team wants to conclude with a contemporary chorus.

You will draw on this case throughout the next session of Growing Bridgebuilders. So make a few notes about the situation below.

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Participant Feedback Form

Please complete this form at the end of the session. Thank you.

1. Please circle your evaluation of the following aspects of the session where 1=Unhelpful and 6=Very Helpful:

A. The content and input provided in the session 1 2 3 4 5 6

B. The way the session enabled you to learn 1 2 3 4 5 6

C. How your leaders led and facilitated the session 1 2 3 4 5 6

D. How participants worked and interacted together 1 2 3 4 5 6

E. THE SESSION OVERALL 1 2 3 4 5 6

2. What you most appreciated or found helpful about the session was:

3. One thing you see yourself applying or using from the session is:

4. What you would change or like to be different about the session (either the content, or the way learning was facilitated, or both) was:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this feedback form.

GROUP:

COURSE LEADERS:

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Course Leader's Feedback Form

Please complete a form at the end of each session. Please respond to question 5 after reading your participants' feedback forms. Thank you.

1. Please circle your evaluation of the following aspects of the session where 1=Unhelpful and 6=Very Helpful:

A. Guidance provided in the Leader's Guide	1	2	3	4	5	6
B. PowerPoint slides, handouts, scripts and other materials	1	2	3	4	5	6
C. Quality and appropriateness of the content	1	2	3	4	5	6
D. Process offered for presenting content and enabling learning	1	2	3	4	5	6
E. How you led and facilitated this session	1	2	3	4	5	6
F. How participants worked and interacted together in this session	1	2	3	4	5	6
G. THE SESSION OVERALL	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. What you most appreciated or found helpful about the materials provided for you was:

Thank you for taking time to complete this feedback form. Please then scan it as a PDF file, and email to Bridge Builders:
bb@bbministries.org.uk

Only send the course leaders' feedback form.

Bridge Builders will seek to improve Growing Bridgebuilders in the light of feedback from all the course leaders.

COURSE LEADERS:

LOCATION:

GROUP SIZE:

TYPE OF PARTICIPANTS:

3. What you most struggled with in leading the session was:

4. What you would change or like to be different about the materials provided for you is:
(Note: this could relate either to the content, or to the process for facilitating learning, or both)

5. Having read all the participants' feedback comments what you would most draw attention to is:

6. Any other comments:

DELIBERATE LISTENING

Scripted Role Play



Scenario: The Meeting Space

This independent church meets in the upstairs hall of a community centre. Chris is the children's church leader who has come to talk to Sam, one of the elders.

Before Skills Training

- Chris: 'I don't think I can put up with the community centre as a meeting place much longer. The children's church has had problems for ages. Now we've got a load of extra clutter in the main meeting hall. It's getting worse every week, and I know there are lots of families who are really fed up with it.'
- Sam: 'Yes, I know exactly what you mean – but I think we've just got to be patient while the community centre get their work done downstairs.'
- Chris: 'But it's been going on like this for months. I can't see the centre ever getting their act together. We need to do something about it now before people start leaving the church.'
- Sam: 'Well, I hear what you're saying. But I don't think you should get it out of proportion. It's a bit of building work, and the community centre have said it will be finished soon.'
- Chris: 'That's what they always say. Some of us with children are getting desperate.'
- Sam: 'I do hear you. But, really, I don't know why you're so worried about it. You're moving away soon. The rest of us are sticking around. I think we should trust the community centre to get the job done.'

Pause for feedback from course participants. How's the communication going?

Replayed, After Skills Training

(Note: two chairs needed at the front.)

- Chris: 'I don't think I can put up with the community centre as a meeting place much longer. The children's church has had problems for ages. Now we've got a load of extra clutter in the main meeting hall. It's getting worse every week, and I know there's lots of families who are really fed up with it.'
- Sam: 'Shall we sit down? (They both sit down.) You sound pretty desperate.'
- Chris: 'Well, wouldn't you be? The pressure's awful!'
- Sam: 'I can see that you feel strongly about it. Tell me more about why the space is such a problem.'
- Chris: 'Well, we used to have two rooms before the building work started, and now we're down to one. There are too many children of different ages all in one space. How can we do a decent job?'
- Sam: 'I see. You're finding the reduced space too limiting, and that means the children are missing out. Is that right?'
- Chris: 'Yes. The parents aren't happy.'
- Sam: 'And you're a parent too. So your own kids are affected. Hmmm... (pause) Is there anything else you're concerned about?'
- Chris: 'Well, yes, now you ask. All the extra clutter – like the pool table – it's invading the main hall, so the room's not good for worship. It's spoiling our time together on a Sunday morning.'
- Sam: 'So you're not just worried about the children's groups – you're concerned about our worship life.'
- Chris: 'Yes, that's right. I used to look forward to coming to worship on Sundays. But not now. And I know others who feel that way. I think we'll start to lose some people if something isn't done soon.'
- Sam: 'That's a major concern, then. You think things are so bad that some may choose to worship elsewhere – taking their children with them.'
- Chris: 'Exactly. And I'm not so bothered for my own family. We're moving later in the year and could put up with it until then. But I'm worried about the church. I'd like to see us grow, not shrink.'
- Sam: 'Well, I share that concern. Thank you for taking time to talk with me. Let's think what action we can take. Perhaps you have an idea?'
- Chris: 'Could you talk to the centre and get a definite timetable for completion of the building work, so we know exactly how long it's going on?'
- Sam: 'Yes, I could do that. And I'll raise the issue at the Elders' meeting later this week. We could brainstorm ways to sort out the immediate problems. Does that make sense to you?'
- Chris: 'That's OK. I'd like to know what the community centre say, and what ideas the Elders can come up with.'
- Sam: 'I'll aim to let you know in a week's time. But please get in touch if you've heard nothing by then.'

More feedback from participants: What did the Sam, the elder, do differently? What effect did it have?

CENTRED SPEAKING

Scripted Role Play



Background

Facilitator: Pat (played by person X) is a parishioner who leads a monthly alternative service of mid-week evening prayer in an Anglican church. Alex (played by person Y) is an enthusiastic young curate, who is the clergy person overseeing the service and involved in the small planning group. Pat approaches Alex to express some concerns, taking an un-centred approach.

Un-centred (blaming) Approach

- Pat: (Rather desperately) 'I need to speak with you Alex. I've had enough, and have reached breaking point.'
- Alex: (Initially concerned) 'Oh dear, what's the matter Pat?'
- Pat: 'You just can't treat me like this. We have our meetings and you say you're going to do something – but you never follow through.'
- Alex: (Getting defensive) 'Well, I know, sometimes...'
- Pat: (Cutting in) 'No, you *never* follow through. And as if that's not bad enough, you keep changing the plan for the service at the very last minute. You've got no respect for all the careful preparation others have put in, and just trample all over those of us who've worked on it. I've had enough. This can't go on any more.'
- Alex: (Moving onto the offensive) 'Well if you've lost the vision for the creative evening service, I know there's others who'd be happy to pick up the baton and get involved.'
- Pat: (Over-reacting) 'I knew it. You're trying to get rid of me. Well I'll be speaking with the Vicar about this. I know he appreciates what I've been doing with the alternative service. And I know that he wouldn't want me to leave the church.' (Turns and storms off.)

Invite feedback: Alex is feeling attacked by the way Pat approaches the subject. Alex doesn't handle it well. But why is Alex feeling so attacked?

Take Two

Facilitator: Let's imagine Pat is able to manage emotions and thoughts a bit better, and to put into practice some skills training, even though Alex hasn't had any training. What might a more centred approach by Pat look like? Here's one possibility:

Centred Approach

Pat: (Firmly but gently) 'I would appreciate a chat with you Alex. I've got some concerns about how things went at the alternative service earlier in the week.'

Alex: (Jovially) 'Oh really? I thought it was a great service and people really enjoyed it.'

Pat: (Still gentle but firm) 'I think some people did enjoy it. But I was left rather unhappy myself. Can we talk about how it went from my perspective?'

Alex: (A bit more serious) 'Of course. What's the problem?'

Pat: 'Well, I was disappointed to get to the chapel and find that the data projector and screen weren't set up; and by the time I got there it was too late to sort out. I'd understood that you'd agreed at our last planning meeting to arrange for the office manager, Catherine, to set it up in advance. I was planning to show some images during the reflection time, and it just didn't have the same impact without them. I was left feeling that all my careful preparation was wasted effort.'

Alex: 'Oh dear, yes, you're right: I'd meant to ask Catherine, but she wasn't around in the morning, and I got distracted by other things later. I'm sorry.'

Pat: (Remaining gentle but firm) 'Thank you. But that wasn't the only difficulty for me. I was completely thrown when you decided to invite everyone to join in with an Israeli dance mid-way through the service. We hadn't discussed it when planning the service, and you didn't forewarn me before announcing it. I then struggled to get the service back on track afterwards; and was left feeling bewildered and confused.'

Alex: (A bit defensively) 'But several people came up to me afterwards and said they really had loved the spontaneous dance!'

Pat: (Remaining gentle but firm) 'Yes, I could see that there were some who enjoyed it. However, for me, it completely threw me off course, and meant I was struggling for the rest of the service. And I don't feel that I did a good job with leading the rest of the time.'

Alex: 'Well it seemed fine to me.'

Pat: (Remaining gentle but firm) 'What happened with both of these issues seems to be part of pattern over recent weeks. I would really appreciate taking some time on another occasion to talk about the way we plan the alternative services, how actions are followed up on, and how we handle unplanned bright ideas. Would you be willing to do that?'

Alex: 'OK, I suppose, if you're not happy.'

Pat: 'Thank you, Alex – I would appreciate that. I'm keen to stay involved; so I would value talking these issues through further.'

Invite feedback: How do you think that Alex is feeling now? Still attacked? Does Pat feel any less strongly about things than in the first scenario? What's better about the way Pat raised the concerns this time?