



Listening Partnership Challenge Worksheet

Support can come in many forms. It could look like someone doing something for you or it could even be someone **really** listening to you, holding space for you to process your thoughts and emotions. This is the purpose of a Listening Partnership.

What are Listening Partnerships?

Listening partnerships provide a safe, encouraging space for you to think out loud, sort through the clutter of your mind and release emotions so they don't come out in other (less constructive) ways.

The guidelines of Listening Partnerships are fairly simple - each partner has an equal amount of time to talk about whatever is on their minds. The partner listening, does just that, listen. No comments, no questions, maybe an encouraging mm-hmm once in a while to show you are listening, but the idea is just to hold space for the other person to talk and process.

Why Should I Try a Listening Partnership?

Taking the opportunity to think out loud allows us to access our own inner wisdom, helps us release frustration and tension to make room for calmness and joy, and prevents the stress of suppressed emotion from having a physical effect on our bodies. Experiencing what it feels like to have someone listen to you and accept you unconditionally satisfies our deepest need to be known. Offering this to someone else is a gift, to them and ourselves. Practicing this in a Listening Partnership can help us develop these skills with our children and partners too.

Who Would I Partner with?

Although you can use the structure of a Listening Partnership with a friend, or even a family member, it's recommended that you find someone new to partner up with. It's hard with someone you know not to slip into the regular way that you communicate, which can take away some of the value of the process. You will be partnered up with someone in your group, and you may wish to continue this partnership past this program! We've had moms continue their listening partnership for years!

How Do Listening Partnerships Work?

Once you've connected with your partner, pick a mutually agreeable time to meet, by phone or online (Zoom, Facetime, etc). Each partner will get an equal amount of time to talk, perhaps 15-30 minutes per person, which can be split into two calls if necessary. The Listener typically times the session, and gives a reminder a few minutes before the end of the Talker's time. A chime or a loud alarm can work well, or you can just say "two minutes" without waiting for the other person to stop speaking. The Talker may want to also see the timer though, so either or both, can time it. However in case the Talker is too engrossed to notice the timer, the Listener

should still make sure that there is a warning and a definite end time. (This is one of the many ways that this is not like a regular conversation!)

The Talker can talk briefly about something that is going well and/OR review a minor upset AND/OR dive into a major issue – if you are bursting to share, dive in. As the Talker, you may feel that you have nothing really to say, but keep talking about anything or sit in silence for a while, and see what comes up. At the end of the first Talker's time, the Listener can ask a question to help focus back on the present. It should be something light and fun, like "What are your three most favorite types of ice cream?"

Then switch roles - the Listener becomes the Talker and the Talker becomes the Listener.

Rules for Listening

There are rules for the Listener to create the safe space necessary for the Talker to best access and release their thoughts and feelings.

1. **Complete confidentiality.** That includes not referring to what your partner said when it is your turn to speak, nor bringing up comments made in previous sessions.
2. **NO advice.** The assumption is that your partner can figure things out on her own.
3. **Don't offer any opinion.** Try to modulate your facial reactions too.
4. **NO criticism.** Even if you strongly disagree with your listening partners choices, your role is not to judge or evaluate. As your partner gets her feelings out and has a chance to explore her thoughts, she may come around to your way of thinking on her own.
5. **Don't interrupt** with your own reactions (such as "that sounds awful!") or to ask questions to satisfy your own curiosity.
6. **Be a warm presence.** Only share to be encouraging. Can make some noise occasionally so that your partner knows that you are there and listening.
7. **Allow silence.** If they stop talking and don't know what to say next, stay silent with them. If after a while they haven't spoken, you can ask them if they want to talk more about an issue they touched on earlier.
8. **Don't try to solve the problem.** The Listener doesn't try to solve the problem, but lets the person learn from his or her own thinking. Remember that the person speaking isn't even usually telling you all sides of the issue. Instead they are expressing their emotions so that they can clear them and think more clearly.

Final tips to keep in mind

For the Listener - the most important thing is that you are holding the space. If your partner sees or hears a reaction in you, that may interrupt their flow.

For the Talker - it can feel awkward at first, but the purpose is to process your emotions, so don't hold back for fear of looking or sounding funny. The more you allow yourself to express, the easier your partner will find it to do the same thing.

Let us know if you have any questions and/or how you find the experience!

Note: GPS was introduced to this tool by Patty Wipfler from Hand in Hand Parenting.