

Active Listening

Leader Huddle Discussion Guide

Ice Breaker:

- Who in your life is a good listener? How have you benefited from that?

Teaching: Active Listening

In our small groups – and in one-on-one conversations with our small group members – we need to be effective listeners. There are few things more validating to people than when others take the time to truly listen to them.

Today, we're going to look at the five steps to active listening. These are non-verbal ways we tell another person "I'm listening and I'm interested in what you are saying."

These spell out the acronym SOLER and are:

- **Squarely** face the person
- **Open** your posture
- **Lean** towards the other
- **Eye** contact maintained
- **Relax** while attending

Let's walk through these. Some of these are more specific to a one-on-one conversation, but they can all be applied to a group setting as well.

S: Sitting squarely says, "I'm here with you, I'm available to you." In contrast, turning your body away from another person while you talk to him or her can lessen your degree of contact with that person. If, for any reason, facing the person squarely is too threatening for them, then an angled position may be more helpful. Sitting at more of a 5 o'clock position also helps to avoid the possibility of staring at them.

O: Adopt an open posture. Crossing your arms or your legs can be a sign of lessened involvement with or availability to others. An open posture says you are open to them and what they have to say. It is non-defensive in nature.

L: It can be helpful to lean slightly in towards the other person. It says, "I'm with you, I'm interested in you and what you have to say." Leaning back can suggest the opposite. However, it's important not to lean *too* far forward or you may be seen as placing a demand on them and they may find it intimidating.

E: Maintain good eye contact. It's another way of saying, "I'm interested, I'm with

you.” Remember this is not the same as staring. You will need to look away every so often, in order not to stare, but monitor the amount you look away. It could say something about your own level of comfort or discomfort.

R: Be relaxed or natural. If you are fidgeting nervously it will distract the other person. Being relaxed also tells them that you are comfortable with using your body as a vehicle of personal contact and expression. It helps put them at ease.

If you really want to recognize the importance of these, think through the opposite. Have you ever been leading a small group or in a meeting where someone is going on and on and you just want them to shut up? What do you do? You turn away, you avoid eye contact, you cross your arms – you do anything you can to hint to them that you are not interested. Right?

We recognize the value of this when we want someone to stop talking. We need to also remember it and be intentional about it when we want someone to start or continue sharing.

Discussion Questions:

- Which of the active listening steps resonates most with you? How have you seen it at work in your own life?
- Which of the active listening steps seems most awkward to you? Why?
- If you were more intentional about active listening in your group, how would that impact it?
- If you were more intentional about active listening in one-on-one conversations, how would that impact them?