

Spaces For Listening

*I wish we could talk about our hearts
like we talk about the weather,
because whether or not we are okay
is more important
than the chance of rain.*

R H Swaney

The following is credited to colleagues Brigid Russell and Charlie Jones and has been modified to support testing out this approach across the Grampian system.

A bold idea

There seems to be a yearning for space, a chance to be heard. Many of us are seeking to understand more about what's going on, and where we might go next. If we are going to find the most sustainable and humane ways to move forward, then don't we need a better quality of conversations? Getting on with creating these spaces, keeping it simple yet meaningful, seems like a bold idea.

Could it really be as simple as listening to each other more, creating more space to listen and be heard? Well, we think that it would be a very good start.

What if we gathered together in a space and shared with each other: how we are feeling; what we are thinking; and what we are hoping for?

Such space for listening does not give us the 'answer'. It's not training, nor an intervention to solve a problem, not something to be written in to a PDP. What it does is give us breathing space: to find out and share what is going on for each of us; and, to hear where others are too.

A structured space

It is a simple, structured process which creates a space in which we each have an equal opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings, and to experience an equality of listening; there is no hierarchy. It is about starting where we are; sharing what is going on for each of us.

We all need to be aware to look after our self in this space, as we might find it enables thoughts and feelings to be expressed in ways that can feel moving, or even a little unsettling.

If following the session you feel it would be useful to speak with someone about how you are feeling you can access support from the Grampian *We Care* Programme www.nhsgrampian.org/your-health/wecare and the National Wellbeing Hub www.nationalwellbeinghub.scot

The structure of three rounds of timed contributions (2 minutes per person, in each round) provides a safe and confidential space in which we can each choose to open up and explore our ideas and feelings. Each one of us takes a turn, in order, and in so doing we each experience a level of listening, an equal chance to share, and a spirit of appreciation. It's always okay to pass in any particular round. The core principles of the approach are to stick to the timings and a set running order, thereby ensuring the equality of space and safety each person experiences.

A chance to create a different future

We believe that *Spaces for Listening* could help to create the conditions for better conversations – in our teams, throughout our organisations, across society. The conversations which need to be happening about work, societal change, and the ‘what next’ after Covid-19.

These Spaces for Listening are unedited. Our experience is that they enable us to go on and have conversations elsewhere which are more real, purposeful, and meaningful. It all starts with the quality of our listening, and the quality of our appreciation for each other. Better conversations lead to more effective relational working.

An experience to spark change

We believe that the best way to understand the quality and potential of this simple, structured approach is to experience it. We offer the Space for Listening as a one-off experience with *this* particular gathering of people.

An outline of the structure

There is a structure in the form of listening rounds, held by a host (the host is also an equal participant). There is a prompt for each round. The host will let us know whose turn it is next. Each of us will get 2 minutes in turn, timed and called out by the host. After the first round, we will stick to the same order of people in rounds 2 and 3. Each of us can use our time to say whatever we like; at 2 minutes, the host will indicate that time is up, and we'll move on to the next person.

If any of us want to pass when it is our turn, this is completely fine; at the end of the round the host will come back to any of us who have ‘passed’ to see if we now want to say anything. We do not interrupt each other or open up into a general conversation. We can choose, if we like, to comment on what others have said within our own allotted 2 minutes.

- In Round 1, the prompt is: *How are you and what is on your mind right now?*
- In Round 2, the invitation is to *share your reflections and feelings now, and in the light of what you have heard in Round 1.*
- In Round 3, the invitation is to *share one thing you might like to take forwards, and also to offer some appreciation to any particular thoughts or any aspects of the call that have resonated with you.*

At the end of Round 3, the session ends.

A few words on the hosts...

We have experienced the benefits of *Spaces for Listening*. We are not setting ourselves up as experts. We just know that listening, sharing what’s going on for us, and being heard are fundamentally helpful. We have trusted the relational connections we have made in our system, taken a risk, and put these ideas into practice. We believe that more space for listening can make a fundamental difference to the quality of our conversations – and our chances for making real and sustainable social change.

3 core principles:

1. Equality of listening – eg no hierarchy or sharing of job titles
2. Hosts are equal participants, they do not lead
3. Participation is voluntary; when invited to participate colleagues can decline ie it is not implemented in a team without being by invitation only

If you would like to find out more, or offer any feedback following on from the experience, please contact any of

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