

Deep Listening as We Age¹

Why Deep Listening Matters

As we grow older, many of us discover that one of the greatest gifts we can offer another person is not our advice, experience, or answers. It is **our full attention**.

Most of us know what it feels like to talk with someone who is already preparing their response, comparing our experience with their own, trying to solve our problem, or telling us what we should do. We may have been heard, but we have not necessarily felt **received**.

Deep listening is different. It begins with the conviction that another person's life and story deserve our attention. We listen not simply to understand their words, but to understand the person behind the words—their hopes, losses, fears, questions, joys, regrets, and perhaps things they are only beginning to understand themselves.

Deep listening asks us to make a subtle but important shift:

Instead of asking, “What should I say next?”

we begin asking, “What is this person really trying to tell me?”

We become less concerned with fixing, advising, comparing, correcting, or judging, and more willing to simply **be present**.

Deep Listening and Growing Older

By the time we reach our 60s and beyond, we have accumulated decades of experience. We have learned things. We have made mistakes. We have experienced successes and failures, love and loss, beginnings and endings. Naturally, we may want to share what we have learned.

But aging can invite us into another kind of wisdom. **Knowledge accumulates through information; wisdom matures through attention.** Mature wisdom may be expressed less through having the right answer and more through attentive presence, thoughtful questions, patience, and the willingness to listen before speaking.

This may be an important part of growing older rather than simply becoming older.

Our role gradually shifts:

from answering → to wondering

from fixing → to accompanying

from advising → to asking

from judging → to becoming curious

from needing to be heard → to helping another person feel heard

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Deep listening can be one way we give back.

Listening to One Another's Stories

One of the most important dimensions of deep listening is learning to receive another person's story without immediately judging or interpreting it.

Every one of us enters our later years carrying a lifetime of stories. Some are stories of joy and accomplishment. Others involve disappointment, grief, mistakes, broken relationships, forgiveness, love, faith, doubt, reconciliation, and unresolved questions.

When someone entrusts us with part of their story, we don't necessarily need to do anything with it.

Sometimes the gift is simply:

“I hear you.”

“Your story matters.”

“You don't have to explain or defend yourself here.”

“You don't have to carry this alone.”

Listening in this way can change both people. Another person's story can challenge assumptions we have carried for years, awaken compassion, and help us recognize something about our own lives.

Ideas for deep listening at gatherings (or one-to-one conversations) with family, friends, co-workers, groups, educational classes, and more.

Our Invitation for This Conversation:

For an in-person and/or virtual gathering, we don't need to discuss deep listening as an idea.

We can practice it.

When another person shares, try not to formulate your response while they are speaking. Don't immediately offer advice or tell a similar story from your own life. Notice any desire to fix, correct, reassure, or interpret.

Instead, become curious.

Listen for the life underneath the words.

Allow some silence.

Trust that your presence may be enough.

Personal Story Prompts

Choose whichever prompt opens a story within you. There is no need to answer them all.

1. **Tell us about someone who truly listened to you.** What did they do that made you feel deeply heard?
2. **Tell us about a time when someone stayed with you during a difficult period without trying to fix what was happening.** Why did that presence matter?
3. **What is one experience from your life that you understand differently today than you did when you were younger?**
4. **When have you received advice when what you really needed was someone to listen?** What did that teach you?
5. **What has become harder—or easier—to talk about as you've grown older?**
6. **Tell us about one of the thresholds you've experienced in later life:** retirement, loss, changing health, family changes, estrangement, becoming a grandfather, changing faith, changing purpose, or another transition. Who listened to you during that time?
7. **Who might need you to listen to them now?** What might it mean simply to accompany that person rather than trying to change the situation?
8. **How has your understanding of wisdom changed as you've grown older?** Do you feel the same need to have answers that you once did?
9. **What story from your life would you like younger generations to hear—not because it gives them an answer, but because it might help them feel less alone?**
10. **What would it mean for deep listening to become part of your eldering—one of the gifts you offer your family, younger and older generations, and your community?**

A Question to Carry with Us

Perhaps one invitation of our later years is to move from listening because we want to know what to say to listening because we genuinely want to **know the person**. The source material describes this as the difference between listening that gathers information and listening that “gathers people.”

So perhaps we leave our conversation with one question:

As I grow older, am I becoming the kind of person in whose presence another person feels safe enough to tell the truth about their life?

Deep Listening

A Gift for Every Season of Life

When we truly listen, we honor one another's stories, deepen our connections, and help create a kinder, more compassionate world.

REAL PEOPLE
REAL STORIES
DEEPER CONNECTIONS
A MORE COMPASSIONATE
WORLD

"Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is simply listen."

We are better together at every age.

WHY DEEP LISTENING MATTERS



Every person's story matters.
We all want to feel seen, valued, and understood.



It builds trust and stronger relationships.
Listening opens the door to deeper connection.



It reduces loneliness.
Being truly heard helps us feel we belong.



It creates a more compassionate world.
When we listen, we see life through another's eyes.

WHAT DEEP LISTENING LOOKS LIKE



Be fully present.
Give your undivided attention.



Listen to understand, not to respond.
Let go of the need to fix, advise, or compare.



Welcome silence.
Allow time for thoughts and feelings to emerge.



Be open and curious.
Ask gentle questions and suspend judgment.



Receive the whole person.
Listen for what is said, what is felt, and what is left unsaid.

HOW DEEP LISTENING ENRICHES OUR LIVES



We gain wisdom.
Listening helps us learn from one another's experiences.



We navigate life's transitions with greater grace.
We don't have to face change alone.



We grow in empathy.
We become more patient, curious, and kind.



We leave a positive legacy.
Our listening can encourage, heal, and bless others — family, friends, and future generations.



*Deep listening is not about having the right answers.
It is about creating a safe and welcoming space for another person's story to unfold.*



DISCUSSION PROMPTS FOR OUR CONVERSATION

Choose a prompt that feels meaningful to you. There is no need to answer them all.

- 1 Who has truly listened to you in your life? What did they do that made you feel heard?
- 2 Tell us about a time when someone stayed with you during a difficult period without trying to fix things. How did that help you?
- 3 What is one life experience you understand differently now than you did when you were younger?
- 4 When have you received advice when what you really needed was someone to listen? What did that teach you?
- 5 What has become easier—or harder—to talk about as you've grown older? Why?

- 6 Tell us about a significant transition in your life (retirement, loss, health changes, family changes, a new chapter, etc.). Who listened to you during that time?
- 7 Who in your life might need your listening now? What might it mean to simply be present with them?
- 8 How has your understanding of wisdom changed over the years? Do you feel the same need to have answers that you once did?
- 9 What story from your life would you like younger generations to hear—not because it gives an answer, but because it might help them feel less alone?
- 10 What would it mean for deep listening to be part of your ongoing contribution to your family, friends, community, and the world?

*At every age,
we have something to learn.
We also have something to give.*

LISTEN | LEARN | CONNECT | BELONG | BLESS

*People.
Stories.
A Brighter Tomorrow.*