

STORYTELLING GUIDE: RESOURCE 6

Getting Stories Started: For Listeners

Listeners have an important role to play in any situation involving stories.

As a listener, you offer your attention, encouragement, interest, and support to any storyteller. Your face, body language, and words all provide feedback to inform the storyteller. Use this guide to get started on becoming a better listener. Note: These suggestions are intended as reminders and personal checkpoints rather than used as a formula. Feel free to skip suggestions that do not work for you or the situation you are in—make it your own!

Get Ready

- 1) Make sure you are ready to be fully present as a listener. Try to eliminate distractions from your mind or environment.
- 2) Be willing to let the story stretch you beyond what you know, expect, or want.
- 3) Demonstrate your attention—take notes, give eye contact, nod.

Reset Your Mindset

- 1) Avoid trying to fit someone's story into your agenda. Surrender to the story and don't be afraid of what you don't already know.
- 2) Change your mental questions. Don't evaluate or hurry the story, ask yourself what you can learn.
- 3) Try to commit moments to memory and seek out connections.

Listen to Specifics

- 1) Listen for the story's detail and imagine it taking place. Put yourself in their shoes.
- 2) Listen for the structure, including the journey of the story, the conflicts or problems involved, and the universal idea.
- 3) Listen for what the story teaches you about the storyteller.

Question Yourself

- 1) As you listen, ask yourself why the person is telling you the story. Appreciate that this story is somehow personally important.
- 2) Question whether you are making assumptions about the storyteller and how you see the world might be different from their experience.

Ask Your Speaker Questions

- 1) Ask questions that clarify important characters, details, moments, takeaways. Make sure you aren't getting stuck somewhere. Seek to understand, not to critique.
- 2) Ask questions that encourage the speaker, asking them to elaborate, go back, and follow up on what happened next.

Other Feedback

- 1) Only give feedback when solicited by the storyteller or required by the situation; focus feedback on areas important to the storyteller.
- 2) Focus on content, which may include detail, structure, time management, specificity of moment, clarity of theme, and ability to connect personally.

