

Four Agreements for Listening Partnership

1. Respect your partnership with your best commitment and attention

Imagine the Beatles (or Elvis, or another great band of your choice) reincarnated went on tour and you managed to get your hands on a ticket. You would surely

- **Plan for it** and save the date
- **Be there at all costs** short of incapacitating illness or emergency
- **Arrive on time**
- **Devote your full attention** to the concert when it started

An effective listening partnership begins with this level of commitment from both partners. It is worth it: a great listening relationship is as priceless and rare as a Beatles concert. Of course, life happens sometimes. In the event you do have to change a meeting, give your partner as much notice as you can.

2. Divide your meeting time equally

When you divide your available time and use a timer to enforce your agreement, you establish that both partners' needs have equal value in the relationship. This is key to create safety and mutual trust. If you need a bit of transition time between turns, include that in your calculations so you can stop your meeting at the planned time. Each time you make and keep these "small" agreements, you build trust in the relationship.

3. Take 100% responsibility for yourself in the partnership

If you are the Speaker, this means you are responsible for your process. The listener is there to support you but they are not responsible for your experience. If you have a certain way you like to hear your words reflected, let your listener know, and let them know how much notice you'd like before your time is up.

If you are the Listener, this means you stick to listening and reflecting unless the speaker explicitly asks for something more from you. To pull this off, you must cultivate three qualities:

1. **Awareness:** the ability to notice your emotional reactions to the Speaker
2. **Self-empathy:** the ability to hold your reactions with compassion
3. **Self-restraint:** the commitment to refrain from expressing your emotions, opinions or ideas unless the Speaker directly asks you to.

Note: It's very helpful to mirror your partner's intensity or their tone. Just don't add your own content. Listeners often worry they "aren't doing anything" if they aren't offering advice, analysis, comfort, reassurance, etc. On the contrary: to be listened to by someone who has the skill and willingness to "hold" their own reactions to the side is a precious gift. The more you can notice and "hold" your own reactions, the more you will be able to sense the shared field between you and the Speaker and attune your responses to them.

4. After a Listening session, discuss the process but not the content

If you are the Listener, refrain from discussing the actual content of the session afterwards, and never ever give advice or information unless the Speaker explicitly asks you for it. You can ask the Speaker how you did as a Listener: “Was that a good amount of reflection?” or “I chose not to reflect what you were saying about your colleague...it just didn’t feel right to speak at that moment. How was that for you?” Or the Speaker might say to you, “I loved how you reflected that one part in an angry voice—that’s exactly how it was feeling inside me, and it made me realize I was holding back!”

If you are the Speaker, you have the right to say “OK, let’s discuss that content I just covered.” But please check in carefully with yourself before you do this. A deep shift can occur in a Listening session, and sometimes talking muddies waters that had just begun to settle in to clarity, or crushes things that are newly formed and delicate. Just like a butterfly needs time to sit in the sun and dry its wings after it emerges from the chrysalis, new shifts, insights, or ways of being often need space and quiet before they are ready to be “touched” or discussed.

The four agreements:

- Respect your partnership with your best commitment and attention
- Divide your meeting time equally
- Take 100% responsibility for your self in the partnership
- After a Listening session, discuss the process but not the content