



**Health Workforce Initiative**

**Hi-Touch Healthcare: The Critical Six Soft Skills**

*Grab-N-Go Independent Training Module:*

# Listening

HEALTH WORKFORCE INITIATIVE STATEWIDE ADVISORY COMMITTEE, CALIFORNIA  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES CHANCELLOR'S OFFICE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



# Listening

## Grab-N-Go

### Independent Training Module

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# Listening

## Background Information

Effective listening is a central component of good business practices in general and plays an even more important role in quality healthcare. The positive impacts of effective listening are wide ranging for patients, the organization, and for employees. Patient satisfaction in HCAHPS responses is positively impacted when patients perceive that providers are listening to what they have to say<sup>i</sup> and interprofessional collaborations are improved when mutual listening occurs between healthcare providers.<sup>ii</sup> Effective listening also leads to significant benefits for patient-care in diverse areas such as complementary and integrative medicine in oncological treatment,<sup>iii</sup> patient-self management with chronic-care,<sup>iv</sup> and the facilitation of grief support.<sup>v</sup>

Conversely, ineffective listening creates multiple challenges. According to one study, "more than 60 percent of errors made in business come from poor listening."<sup>vi</sup> The systemic nature of poor listening in the healthcare industry may further alienate medically and socially disenfranchised populations already at risk for lack of basic health care.<sup>vii</sup>

Despite the abundance of evidence that listening improves organizational efficiency, customer satisfaction, employee morale, leadership effectiveness, and, is "the oldest and conceivably most influential tool of healing,"<sup>viii</sup> ineffective listening continues to plague many healthcare providers and institutions.



Lucas contends that “in our communication-oriented age, listening is more important than ever.”<sup>ix</sup> This recognition has led to the development of multiple methods for enhancing listening skills.<sup>x</sup> Although there is no single approach for improvement and there are many names associated with listening skills, the term “active listening” will be used for the purposes of this training.

Although active listening is frequently associated with healthcare patient-practitioner communication, for the purposes of this training, we broaden the intended audience here to include all those involved in the communication process within a healthcare setting. Active listening for this training will therefore address the *interpersonal communication skills in the listening process that encourages others to talk, fostering understanding and improving relationships*. This module will focus on the importance of listening, listening preferences, mindless vs mindful listening, and the steps of active listening.



## Training



**Overall Goal:** Participants will learn the basics of what to do before, during, and after engaging in active listening.

**WIIFM: What's in it for me?** Active listening is an important communication skill for everyone involved in delivery of quality healthcare, regardless of job function or title. This session helps participants understand how his/her own listening behaviors before, during, and after work for or against effective active listening outcomes.

“If we use frequency as a measure, then listening easily qualifies as the most important kind of communication”... “Studies show that most employees of major corporations in North America spend about 60% of each workday listening to others.”<sup>xi</sup>



### **Materials Provided:**

1. Active Listening Module PowerPoint (60-90 minutes)
2. “Life with the Wright Family” Activity (10 - 15 minutes)
3. Chart Nurse and Patient Role Playing Activity (10 - 15 minutes)
4. Nurse Manager and Nurse Role Playing Activity (10 - 15 minutes)
5. How Many Good Listeners Do You Know Activity (5-10 minutes)
6. Optional Listening Self-Assessment (Provide one copy per participant as a take-a-way or pre-assessment as determined by the trainer)
7. Optional Case Studies



**Directions for the Trainer:** Activity preparation information is included in this document and/or within the PowerPoint presentation notes. Each PowerPoint slide, as appropriate, includes detailed explanations and instructions for the trainer. As with all Grab-N-Go Modules, you can use it all for a more detailed training, or simply use one or two of the many Activities—A la Carte style!



## ACTIVITY #1

### Wright Family Listening Activity



**Goal:** To demonstrate that it is difficult to multitask and listen effectively. We often have tasks that pull us in many directions at once, but it is important to remember that effective listening is vitally important to ensuring high quality patient care.



**Materials Needed** (Quantities vary by how many in the group)

- ☐ The Wright Family Story
- ☐ Paper clip or some other small item for each person in the group
- ☐ PowerPoint Slides 5-6



**Procedures:**

1. Have your entire group stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder.
2. Give each person in the circle a playing card, penny or some other small item that can be passed easily from hand to hand.
3. Tell the group that you are going to read them a story and every time they hear any word that sounds like “right,” they are to pass the object in their hand to the person on their right, and every time they hear the word “left,” they should pass the object to the left.
4. Start reading the story slowly so that they have a chance to catch on to what you want them to do. After a few passes, stop the story and ask them how they are doing. Check to see that everyone has an object in his/her hand. If your group is typical, some will have two or three objects and others will not have any. Have them redistribute the objects so that everyone is holding one object.
5. Now continue to read the story, reading faster as you go. Stop the story a couple more times to check on how the group is doing.
6. After reading the story, ask the following questions:
  - a. How much of the story can you remember?
  - b. What does this activity tell us about communication?
  - c. What does this activity tell us about teamwork?
  - d. What does this activity tell us about listening skills?
7. After the group has discussed the purpose of the activity, tell them that this activity required teamwork, just like working in the hospital does. Tell them that during this activity, the idea was to not get too distracted by the rights and lefts and to stay focused on what was happening in the story. Similarly, in our everyday lives, we often have tasks that pull us in many directions, but we should always remember what is important needs to be regular dash not two small ones please the health of the patients.



## ACTIVITY #1

### Wright Family Listening Activity



#### Story

One day the Wright family decided to take a vacation. The first thing they had to decide was who would be left at home since there was not enough room in the Wright family car for all of them. Mr. Wright decided that Aunt Linda Wright would be the one left at home. Of course this made Aunt Linda Wright so mad that she left the house immediately, yelling, “It will be a right cold day before I return.”

The Wright family now bundled up the children, Tommy Wright, Susan Wright, Timmy Wright, and Shelly Wright and got in the car and left. Unfortunately, as they turned out of the driveway someone had left a trashcan in the street so they had to turn right around and stop the car. They told Tommy Wright to get out of the car and move the trash can so they could get going. Tommy took so long that they almost left him in the street. Once the Wright family got on the road, Mother Wright wondered if she had left the stove on. As they turned right at the corner, everyone started to think about the other things that they might have left undone.

No need to be sorry now; they were off on a right fine vacation. When they arrived at the gas station, Father Wright put gas in the car and then discovered that he had left his wallet at home. So Timmy Wright ran home to get the money that was left behind. After Timmy had left, Susan Wright started to feel sick. She left the car saying that she had to throw up. This of course got Mother Wright’s attention and she left the car in a hurry. Shelly Wright wanted to watch Susan get sick, so she left the car too. Father Wright was left with Tommy Wright who was playing a game in the backseat.

With all of this going on Father Wright decided that this was not the right time to take a vacation, so he gathered up all the family and left the gas station as quickly as he could. When he arrived home, he turned left into the driveway and said, “I wish the Wright family had never left the house today! Right?”



## ACTIVITY #2

### Role Playing Listening Activity: Chart Nurse and Patient



**Goal:** To demonstrate that not engaging in active listening inhibits rather than aids in ensuring quality patient care.



**Materials Needed:**

- ☐ A copy of the Chart Nurse and Patient Activity role playing instructions
- ☐ PowerPoint Slide #13

*Planning Note:*

- Print the participant instructions on the following page (p. 8). Print one page for every two people and cut each page in half making two sets of instructions. Separate the pages into two sets (Partner 1 and Partner 2).



**Procedures:**

- Announce that this is a role playing activity and then provide the following directions:
  - Pair off. Explain that each person will be provided with instructions describing his or her role.
  - Distribute the instructions you have printed to the participants making sure that one person has instructions for Partner 1 and the other person has instructions for Partner 2. Instruct the participants that they are not to show their instructions to their partners. Ask the pairs to begin, explain that you will stop them after three minutes.
  - After three minutes, ask the partners to share with one another their observations and experience of the role playing activity.
  - After the participants have shared their experiences of the activity with one another, bring the group together and ask questions such as:
    - How well did your partner listen?
    - What behaviors did you observe that made you feel as though your partner was not listening?
    - Did you feel you were being understood? Why or why not?
    - What was it like for you in your role?





## ACTIVITY #2

### Role Playing Listening Activity: Chart Nurse and Patient

**Partner 1:** You will be playing the role of a nurse. You are assessing the patient and charting at the bedside. Your patient will start talking to you, pay attention to your patient for about 30 seconds. Then begin to get distracted. Be **subtle** in demonstrating that you are distracted, but don't be obvious. Examples: look at the computer screen and keep charting, look at your watch, glance around, drop your pen, answer questions before your patient completely finishes a sentence, etc. Do not reveal your instructions to your partner.

**Partner 2:** Imagine that you are a patient in the hospital. Playing the role of a scared patient describe your symptoms and concerns of your new and overwhelming diagnosis to your partner who is playing the role of a nurse. Be very descriptive and ask questions as if you are a patient concerned about his or her health. Do not reveal your instructions to your partner.



## ACTIVITY #3

### Role Playing Listening Activity: Nurse Manager and Nurse



**Goal:** To demonstrate that *not* engaging in active listening negatively impacts (different font sizes?) interprofessional collaborative relationships.



**Materials Needed:**

- ☐ A copy of the Chart Nurse and Patient Activity role playing instructions
- ☐ PowerPoint Slide #13

*Planning Note:*

- Print the instructions on the following page (p. 10). Print one page for every two people and cut each page in half making two sets of instructions. Separate the pages into two sets (Partner 1 and Partner 2).



**Procedures:**

- Announce that this is a role playing activity and then provide the following directions:
  - Pair off. Explain that each person will be provided with instructions describing his or her role.
  - Distribute the instructions you have printed to the participants making sure that one person has instructions for Partner 1 and the other person has instructions for Partner 2. Instruct the participants that they are **not** to show their instructions to their partners. Ask the pairs to begin, explain that you will stop them after three minutes.
  - After three minutes, ask the partners to share with one another their observations and experience of the role playing activity.
  - After the participants have shared their experiences of the activity with one another, bring the group together and ask questions such as:
    - How well did your partner listen?
    - What behaviors did you observe that made you feel as though your partner was not listening?
    - Did you feel you were being understood? Why or why not?
    - What was it like for you in your role?



## ACTIVITY #3

### Role Playing Listening Activity: Nurse Manager and Nurse

**Partner 1:** Do not reveal these instructions to your partner. You are playing the role of a nurse manager. In this scenario you will be explaining to one of your nurses that there is a new procedure required for admitting a patient. Admit clerks will no longer verbally notify nurses when a patient has been checked in. Instead, nurses will be responsible for checking their computers for pop-up window notifications that a patient is ready to be seen. Explain that the new procedure will streamline the admission process because the admission clerk will no longer need to leave their work station to notify nurses that patients have been checked in.

- After you have informed the nurse of this new policy allow the nurse to respond. For the first 30 seconds you should be a very attentive listener. Then begin to get distracted. Be **subtle** in demonstrating that you are distracted, but don't be obvious. Examples: look away, look at your watch, or drop your pen, etc. You may also interrupt them and reassert your opinion that the new procedure will streamline the admission process. Don't be aggressive or hostile.

**Partner 2:** Do not reveal these instructions to your partner. You are playing the role of a nurse. Your partner is playing the role of a nurse manager. Your role begins after the nurse manager has explained a new admitting policy to you. Once the nurse manager has finished explaining the new policy share the concerns listed below as though you feel very upset about the changes for the following reasons:

1. You feel strongly that the computer program is limited because there are no entry fields for information that a patient might reveal during the admission process such as a patient's past experience and/or concerns about their medical condition. Consequently, important information will not be passed on from the admitting clerk to the nurse before the patient is seen.
2. You believe that the electronic notification system will cause delays because nurses might easily overlook the electronic notifications that patients are ready to be seen. As a result, patients will wait longer than necessary to be seen.
3. The electronic notification system is a one-way system that doesn't allow nurses to respond to the admission clerks to explain if they are running behind schedule and what to report to the patients.

Do not discontinue the role play until you have shared all three concerns with your partner



## ACTIVITY #4

### How Many Good Listeners Do You Know Activity



**Goal:** To demonstrate how few people in our personal and professional networks engage in active listening and that we need to improve our active listening skills.



**Materials Needed:**

- ☐ PowerPoint Slide #23



**Procedures:**

- Ask the participants to think of all of their friends that they interact with on a fairly regular basis (pause for a few seconds), then ask them to think of all of their family members that they interact with on a fairly regular basis (pause for a few seconds), and then ask them to think of all of their colleagues that they interact with on a fairly regular basis (pause for a few seconds).
- Ask the participants to think about a challenging or traumatic time in their life (pause a few seconds).
- Now ask the participants to think about how many people that they know who would truly listen to them if they were to reach out for help and discuss their situation with them.
  - In other words, who would actively listen to let the entire story unfold and would not “spring board” by saying something like “I remember when I had a similar situation” or offer advice such as “what you should do is...”
  - Now ask them to hold up one finger for every person they know who is a good active listener. Rarely will anyone raise more than 2-3 fingers.
  - This can be a powerful display as everyone looks around the room to see how our collective listening skills are so poor.
- Conclude the activity by asking the participants whether or not their friends, family and colleagues would include them on their list of active listeners.




## Listening Self-Assessment

**Goal:** To help you become more aware of your listening habits.

Instructions: Complete the following listening self-evaluation. Answer each question thoughtfully and after you have answered all the questions turn to the scoring sheet to score your self-assessment.

Put an X in the appropriate column:



Listening Habit	Almost Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1. Do you tune out people who say something you don't agree with or don't want to hear?				
2. Do you concentrate on what is being said even if you're not really interested?				
3. Do you assume you know what the speaker is going to say and stop listening?				
4. Do you repeat in your own words what the speaker has just said?				
5. Do you listen to the other person's viewpoint, even if it differs from yours?				
6. Do you learn something from each person you meet, even if it is ever so slight?				
7. Do you find out what words mean when they are used in ways not familiar to you?				
8. Do you form a rebuttal in your head while the speaker is talking?				
9. Do you give the appearance of listening when you aren't?				
10. Do you daydream while the speaker is talking?				
11. Do you listen to the whole message, what the speaker is saying both verbally and nonverbally?				
12. Do you recognize that words don't mean exactly the same thing to different people?				
13. Do you listen to only what you want to hear, blotting out the talker's whole message?				
14. Do you look at the person who is talking?				
15. Do you concentrate on the speaker's meaning rather than how he or she looks?				
16. Do you know which words and phrases you respond to emotionally?				



Listening Habit	Almost Always	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
17. Do you think about how the other person might react to what you say?				
18. Do you plan the best time to say what you want to say?				
19. Do you think about how the other person might react to what you say?				
20. Do you consider the best way to make your communication (written, spoken, phone, bulletin board, memo, etc.) work?				
21. Do you think about what kind of person you're talking to (worried, hostile, disinterested, rushed, shy stubborn, impatient, etc.)?				
22. Do you interrupt the speaker while he or she is still talking?				
23. Do you think, "I assumed he or she would know that"?				
24. Do you allow the speaker to vent negative feelings toward you without becoming defensive?				
25. Do you practice regularly to increase your listening efficiency?				
26. Do you take notes when necessary to help you remember?				
27. Do you hear noises without being distracted by them?				
28. Do you listen to the speaker without judging or criticizing?				
29. Do you restate instructions and messages to be sure you understand correctly?				
30. Do you paraphrase what you believe the speaker is feeling?				



## Score Sheet

Circle the number that matches the time frame (almost always, frequently, occasionally, or almost never) that you checked on each of the 30 items of the self-evaluation.

**Example** – If you put an X under “frequently” for number 1, you would circle the 2 in the “frequently” column. Then, add the circled scores in each of the columns. Now, write the scores for each of the columns in the lines under each time frame category.



	Almost always	Frequently	Occasionally	Almost Never
1.	1	2	3	4
2.	4	3	2	1
3.	1	2	3	4
4.	4	3	2	1
5.	4	3	2	1
6.	4	3	2	1
7.	4	3	2	1
8.	1	2	3	4
9.	1	2	3	4
10.	1	2	3	4
11.	4	3	2	1
12.	4	3	2	1
13.	1	2	3	4
14.	4	3	2	1
15.	4	3	2	1
16.	4	3	2	1
17.	4	3	2	1
18.	4	3	2	1
19.	4	3	2	1
20.	4	3	2	1
21.	1	2	3	4
22.	1	2	3	4
23.	1	2	3	4
24.	4	3	2	1
25.	4	3	2	1
26.	4	3	2	1
27.	4	3	2	1
28.	4	3	2	1
29.	4	3	2	1
30.	4	3	2	1
Totals				

### Total of items circled in each column:

Almost Always		Frequently		Occasionally		Almost Never		Total
	+		+		+		=	

### Scoring:

110 – 120: Superior

99 – 109: Above Average

88 – 98: Average

77-87: Fair

Below 77: You really need to work on your listening skills!



### Action Plan for Listening

**Action Plan:** Re-examine your responses. What questions do you feel you want to modify and/or improve upon? Pick three and start working on them. To get yourself started on modifying your behavior, consider the following –

In listening, what I want to accomplish is . . .

At work, what I want to accomplish through listening is . . .

In my role a work, what I want to accomplish through listening





## Listening Case Studies

### (Optional)



#### Case Study # 1

Nancy, a volunteer at the local inpatient rehabilitation facility, works at the information desk. She is also a college student and lives with eight other women in a sorority. There has been an admission this morning--Paul, a young high school student, was in a motor vehicle accident approximately six-weeks ago. He has severe brain damage and has been admitted for rehabilitation before he can be sent home.

Nancy is planning the Spring Social for her sorority and is wrapping up last minute details. She is on her cell phone, texting her friend when Paul's mother comes to the front desk. Nancy has her back to Paul's mother, and Paul's mother has to clear her throat to get Nancy's attention. Nancy spins around in her chair, cell phone still in hand, and says "Oh, sorry, can I help you?" Paul's mother asks which room Paul has been admitted to and she is obviously upset and tearful. She starts to say "I can't believe I am going through this, how could this possibly be happening to my..." Before finishing, Nancy's phone beeps that another text has come in. Nancy looks at the screen, smiles, and says, "Just a sec, I need to get this." Paul's mother begins to openly weep, and Nancy says (with her phone still in her hand) "I am so sorry, here are some tissues. Is there something I can do to help?" Paul's mother begins to talk about her son and his accident, obviously needing to discuss what happened. Nancy puts her hand on Paul's mother's shoulder, but continues to look at her phone frequently and takes her hand off the shoulder just long enough to respond to another text.

At this time, after watching the interaction between Nancy and the distraught mother, Nancy's volunteer supervisor walks up to the desk and guides Paul's mother to a chair in the lobby. The supervisor then sits with her.

#### Questions for thought:

1. What should Nancy have done when Paul's mother came up to the desk?
2. Did Nancy do some therapeutic things?
3. What should the supervisor say to Nancy after Paul's mother is calm and has been led to her son's room?
4. What kinds of things can Nancy do or practice to become a better listener?



## Listening Case Studies (Optional)



### Case Study # 2

Suzie, a night shift RN is giving report to the day shift RN, Jade. This is the report:

Suzie: Patient in 403A, 78-year-old female diagnosed with asthma, admitted on...

Jade: Hey Steve!! Don't forget the poker game tonight; what are ya bringing?

Suzie: Admitted on Tuesday. Pulse has been running around 92 on 2 liters via....

Jade: (turns away from Suzie) Hey, Marcos, I want lunch at 11:30 today. (Turns back to Suzie). Oh, hey, sorry, gotta get my order in!!

Suzie: Lungs are with bilateral wheezes, and cough with....

Jade: Marcos, did you hear that? 11:30 man!!

Suzie: Jade, knock it off!!! Are you going to listen to me or not? You never listen to my report!! I hate giving report to you. Would you just listen to me!!

### Questions for thought:

1. With the history that Suzie has had with Jade, how could Suzie make this a more positive experience?
2. How could Jade improve his listening skills?
3. Would there be anything that Jade and Suzie could practice together that might improve the relationship?
4. What could Jade do for himself to improve his listening skills?



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