



THE OJAI FOUNDATION'S
Council In Schools

Inspiring engaged, compassionate school communities

A Council on Listening **Grades 3–12**

Summary

Learning how to really listen to one another – from the heart – is one of the greatest opportunities of council practice. This activity helps students feel what it's like when we don't listen from the heart and compare that to the feeling when we do. This council is especially useful in the beginning stages of a program.

Set context for a council on listening

Open, honest communication is the foundation of council. We sit together and practice the intentions of listening and speaking from the heart – a lifelong practice! Learning to listen well serves us in every relationship, in every aspect of our lives: in school, in college, community, and career – even in nature. Before we go into council, we're going to do an exercise on listening.

Directions for Activity

Have students pair off and decide who is A and who is B. After explaining the exercise, you may want to model it with your co-facilitator or one of the students. Choose a topic (such as high or low point of the week, what they're looking forward to this weekend, etc.). Partner A speaks to the topic first while partner B listens – but not really. Tell partner B to concentrate on thinking about something else while partner A is speaking. While they are still sitting in pairs, ask for responses: What did you notice about yourself when you were talking? What did you notice about yourself when you were the listener? What did you notice about your partner? Have them switch: partner B talks, partner A thinks about something else. Then have them actively listen: Change the discussion topic and have partner A talk, and partner B listen as attentively as possible. After partner A talks for about one minute, partner B reflects back the gist of what A said. Then switch roles. Again, ask for a few responses on the exercise, and then re-form a circle and go into council.

Open Council

Dedication

Story Round

- Tell a story about a time when you were really listened to or a time when you weren't.
- Tell a story about a time when you really listened to someone or a time when you wish you had.
- Tell a story about your favorite person to talk to. Why?

- Tell a story about your favorite person to listen to. Why?

Witness

Say something that stayed with you from the activity and/or the council, or something you are taking away.

Close Council

Tell students you want them to close their eyes for a count of three and in silence actively listen to the sounds around them. On three, they will open their eyes and follow you in a collective, simultaneous finger snap or hand clap. You count one, two, three and lead the clap or snap.

We encourage you to amend this plan in any ways that feel natural to you.

Contributed by Lise Ransdell and Monica Chinlund; edited by Chris Elder.