



Am I Ready to Listen?



Content on this side is intended for the educator's reference. The information on the back can be photocopied and shared with clients.

Objective: Clients will better understand how distractions interfere with their ability to listen and communicate effectively with their partner.

Audience: This tool is applicable to all individuals and can be shared with one partner or with both partners together.

Estimated Time: 10-20 minutes

Educator Instructions: Review the instructions printed on the tool. Discuss the different types of filters and provide some examples, then talk about the types of distractions that tend to be most common for the couple. Read through the questions provided and have the client(s) come up with solutions to the communication problems that are described. Encourage them to think about some ways they can prevent filters from interfering with their ability to both speak and listen during conversations.

Discussion Starter: Good communication is a very important part of building a close, solid couple relationship. It's important to remember that communication refers to both speaking and listening. When speaking, we want to feel listened to and understood. If you or your partner had a bad day, are hungry or tired, or feel frustrated, these thoughts and feelings can distract you from paying attention during a conversation. It's important to monitor how your thoughts and feelings influence the way you respond to each other. It's also important to pay attention to your partner's mood. Share how you are feeling so that you both know if it's a good time to talk. I have a tool that can help you think about common distractions and how you can work together to improve communication.

Follow-up: During your next visit, talk about how their communication patterns changed as a result of being more conscious about distractions and reading each other's moods. Challenge them to continue practicing these skills.





Am I Ready to Listen?



When your partner is talking with you, are you always listening? Sometimes you might just feel like it isn't a good time to talk. A lot of different thoughts, feelings, and stressors can get in the way of our ability to listen and communicate well. These different barriers are sometimes called filters. Filters can make it hard to hear and understand what our partner is saying.

Distractions – Background sounds, such as noisy kids, television, barking dogs, and other noises are common distractions that can make it difficult to hear when someone is talking. Feeling tired or having other things on your mind are also examples of distractions that can make it difficult to pay attention to one's partner.

Emotions – When we are in a good mood, we communicate better than when we are upset or feeling down. If you are hungry, angry, lonely, stressed, tired, or sad, it can be more difficult to talk and pay attention and easier to be short-tempered. We are also more likely to misunderstand what we hear.

Beliefs and Expectations – Past experiences can prevent us from understanding what is being said. If we expect our partner to continue doing or saying the same thing, then we might overlook when something new is shared. We tend to focus on what we already know and ignore new information.

Differences in Style – Everyone has a unique way of communicating. Being familiar with your and your partner's style can help avoid misunderstandings. For example, some people talk louder and use a lot of gestures when communicating, while others tend to be quieter and use fewer gestures. Some people use humor and sarcasm. Both the speaker and listener need to pay careful attention to what is said and what *is not* said to be sure messages are understood correctly.

Self-protection – Has anyone ever told you something that you didn't really want to hear? We all have an instinct to protect ourselves from information that's painful or upsetting. This instinct can distract us from carefully listening. We might also hide our true feelings if we expect to be rejected.

How can you limit distractions from interrupting your conversations?

How can you let your partner know when it is or is not a good time to talk?

If you are not sure you understand what your partner says, how can you ask in a way that won't upset him or her?

Be sure what you said is what was heard, and what you heard was what was said.