

CADRE Working Together Series: Course 3 Lessons 1-2

Lesson 1

Slide 1

Narrator

Welcome to the first lesson of the *Listening and Responding* course. This lesson centers on the steps involved in the listening process, with emphasis on listening for understanding. Listening is possibly the most important skill set needed for parents and educators working together to support students with disabilities.

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Narrator

Key strategies used to listen for understanding include: keep an open mind; hold off on making any judgments; and listen carefully for what might be behind the message.

Slide 3



Narrator

Imagine the following situation. Ms. Adams sees her daughter's teacher, Mrs. Clark, in the hallway as she's dropping off another homework assignment that her daughter forgot on the kitchen counter. She goes up to talk with Mrs. Clark about her concerns with her daughter's struggles keeping track of and turning in her assignments.

Mrs. Clark responds, "I can't talk about this right now; I need to get back into my classroom. I can usually talk after school when I don't have to be with my students."

Ms. Adams leaves and returns after school only to find that Mrs. Clark is not there.

Ms. Adams leaves and is now completely frustrated.

Mrs. Clark, however, had no idea that Ms. Adams was going to come by after school. Mrs. Clark was making a general statement about when it is usually a better time for her to talk with parents. That day, Mrs. Clark had to leave right after school. Unfortunately,

Mrs. Clark didn't share that last piece of information and Ms. Adams didn't ask if she'd be able to talk after school on that particular day. Despite our best efforts to communicate, there are times when the message gets lost.

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Narrator

Listening is an active, multi-step process that requires the listener to be attentive and engaged. Anyone who has ever tried to talk to someone who is doing something else, such as texting, can tell you that distracted listening is not in fact listening at all. Understanding each step of the listening process will help you become a better listener.

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Narrator

The first step in the listening process is hearing. During this step, listeners receive information from what is happening around them and decide what information is useful and what can be filtered out.



For example, in a school environment, a principal may have to filter out the sound of the students walking by and a conversation taking place between staff members in the front office in order to attend to the voice of the person he is talking with who is providing information about a potential scheduling conflict. When there is so much information for us to take in all at once, and we need to quickly determine what information is important to pay attention to, part of a message being sent may be lost. This can make communication very challenging right from the start.

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Narrator

After determining what information is important to attend to, the listener then enters the second step – understanding. During this stage, the listener tries to make sense of the information. This requires paying attention to what is said, how it is said, and any non-verbal messages, such as facial expressions, gestures, or postures, that may be used. We are going to spend most of our time focused on this critical step of the listening process and the intentional practice of listening for understanding.

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Narrator

Think about the last time you felt like someone really listened to you. What did that person do? How did it make you feel? Did it impact your relationship in any way?

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Narrator

For most of us, having someone take the time to really listen to us, especially when we are upset, can have a big impact. Listening for understanding is one way to demonstrate personal regard, essential to forming and maintaining lasting collaborative relationships. When you truly listen for understanding, your communication partner will feel respected, valued, and heard.

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Narrator

Keeping an open and curious mind is important when listening for understanding. A family member who is set on a specific assistive technology device for her child will not be able to listen for understanding when a team member presents another option. A behavior interventionist who is set on a student's placement changing will not be able to listen for understanding when a team member presents another option.

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Narrator

Think of a time when you had your mind set on a specific solution. How did this get in the way of you listening to what the other person had to say?

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Narrator

When listening for understanding it is important to create a welcoming and warm environment. People show their willingness to listen and encourage the speaker in

different ways. Some people are focused and quiet, others encourage the speaker with words, such as, “Yes, yes”, or “Go on.” Non-verbal messages, such as, gestures, facial expressions, or shoulder shrugging can also be important ways to encourage the speaker. People from different backgrounds or cultures may mean very different things by their words or non-verbal messages. It is very important to ask yourself, “Does this person mean the same thing I do by these words or non-verbal messages?” For example, in some cultures eye contact is expected when talking with others. In other cultures it is not. Be aware of the meaning you give to non-verbal messages. It may not be the same as the person you are communicating with.

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Narrator

The third step in the listening process is listen without judgment. Set aside your personal beliefs and opinions, and listen to the ideas of others. Holding onto your personal opinion while trying to listen does not allow you to take in an opposing view. Listening for understanding without judgment can be challenging for many people. There are, however, strategies that can help: focus on the feelings you hear the person expressing, the topics they talk about, the concerns they share, and then what's important to them.

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Narrator

Remembering the message and assigned meaning is the fourth step in the listening process. IEP meetings can be so complex. Often there are many people attending, many pieces of paper to read and understand, and a common flow of the meeting that is very familiar to some school personnel but may seem overwhelming to other team members, including family members. While some might have been listening carefully to the summary of the goals for the coming year, they may need some time to see them in writing and think about them before agreeing to those goals. It would be very easy to forget part of the message regarding the goals because the meeting was complex. If there was an especially emotional part of the goals discussion regarding a child's performance and needs, it would be easy to forget some of the reasons why the IEP team decided a certain goal was necessary. Without remembering the message, there is no way to move on to the next step, interpreting.

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Narrator

Interpreting involves comparing the information that you heard with the information you already know. What do you think of the new information? Does it make sense; do you understand it? For example, a family member shares with the IEP team that her daughter with autism is very agitated at home at night and is having trouble sleeping since her father was deployed overseas. Even though the IEP team hasn't noticed any changes with her daughter's behavior at school, the team members will consider this very important information.

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Narrator

While all of the steps in the listening process require your attention and are necessary to be an effective listener, there are specific strategies you can use to listen for understanding.

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Narrator

Think about your own listening skills. What strategies do you use when you listen? What other strategies might you use the next time you listen to someone?

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Narrator

You've completed Lesson 1 in the *Listening and Responding* course. This course continues in Lesson 2: *Responding*.

Lesson 2

Slide 1

Narrator

Welcome to the second lesson of the *Listening and Responding* course. This lesson focuses on a few key strategies family members and educators can use to respond appropriately to a speaker so that the speaker will know you are hearing and understanding what he or she is saying.

Slide 2

Narrator

These strategies include: reflective listening, asking open-ended questions to learn more about something, and using silence strategically. This lesson also covers what behaviors to avoid when trying to show a speaker you are hearing and understanding what he or she is saying.

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Narrator

Probably the most powerful responding strategy a listener can use is called reflective listening. This is when you summarize in your own words what you hear the speaker

saying and clarify the message. When you reflect back the content, emotions and meaning of the speaker's message, it achieves two things. First, it is an opportunity for the speaker to correct information that may have been misheard. For example, as a listener you respond by saying, "You seem frustrated with your son's lack of progress in math. Is that correct?" The speaker can then respond by saying, "No, not just in math. It's really his overall lack of progress that is frustrating me." Here, reflective listening helped clarify the speaker's concern. In addition to clarifying the message, the second thing reflective listening does is to show the speaker that their message was heard and understood.

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Narrator

Showing that you are truly interested and curious about what the speaker is sharing is important. One way to do this is by asking open-ended questions, like, "What are you thinking?" or "Can you tell me more about that?" These questions are especially helpful when the listener needs clarification, more information, or they want the conversation to continue.

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Narrator

Finally, use silence strategically. Staying quiet and giving ample wait time before responding allows the speaker to feel heard, and allows you as the listener, time to process and formulate a response. Staying quiet shows you value the speaker's message enough to give it your full attention.

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Narrator

Listening for understanding and using strategic responding skills are essential building blocks for establishing effective communication with others. These skills can change the course of a difficult conversation, thereby strengthening the relationships between families and educators. Let's review the scenario from our introductory module. Notice the behaviors that got in the way of effective listening during Mateo's IEP meeting.

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Mrs. Fernandez

Now that we've discussed how Mateo is doing and have established goals for him, we can look at how best to address his educational needs.

Mrs. García

Yeah, I know what your idea of addressing his needs is. You want to send him out of his classroom (*voice breaks*) and put him in a separate classroom away from his friends.

Mr. Barnes

(*Interrupting*) We are just trying to do our job and teach your son.

Mrs. García

Do your job? Really? Well he may be your job, but he's my son and his ability to socialize with and learn from his peers and his happiness are very important to me. Mateo will learn more with his friends. They care about him. Mateo gets a lot of chances to learn from his peers in your classroom, right Ms. Howard?

Ms. Howard

(*Very Quietly*) Umm, I guess.

Mrs. García

He's really learned so much from the other children in Ms. Howard's class. He learns how to act from being with the other students and his social skills have really improved. He's making friends and getting invited to parties. He comes home excited about school and tells me about his day or something he learned about in class. I'm seeing improvements all the time. Having friends and being part of a community are going to help him survive in the world.

Mr. Barnes

I'm glad you think he's happy and making some progress socially, but we have to teach him to read. He needs intensive intervention—the kind I can provide in my classroom! Mrs. Carter, can you explain to Mrs. García again where he is compared to his peers?

Mrs. Carter

I spent a lot of time with Mateo and he scored in the 20th percentile on the DAR.

Mrs. García

I don't know what that score means but... (*phone rings*)

Mrs. Carter

I'm sorry, that's another parent of a child I'm testing. I have to take this.

Mrs. García

(*Upset*) This meeting isn't going anywhere and I'm leaving to discuss this with my husband.

Mrs. Fernandez

Wait Mrs. García, we haven't tried to work this out.

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Narrator

Just like in the scenario, there are some behaviors that get in the way of listening for understanding. How someone responds can trigger intense emotions in others and escalate an already tense situation. Interrupting is one behavior that often gets in the way of listening for understanding. Interruptions can be in the form of commenting too frequently, or finishing a thought or idea for the speaker. When a speaker is interrupted, the message often gets lost. People also tend to view interruptions as a sign of disrespect and may think those who interrupt do not value their contribution. Interrupting, however, does not mean the non-verbal messages, words, or sounds that show the speaker you are really listening to them.

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Narrator

Challenging someone's message to gain support for our own opinion also interferes with listening. A person who listens for understanding must set aside judgment and be open and curious to the ideas presented. If you are constantly thinking of ways to disprove the speaker, you are not able to really listen. You will miss the speaker's message or only get pieces of it if you are trying to find flaws and focusing on how you will argue against it.

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Narrator

Trying to fix the situation is another behavior that interferes with listening. When someone communicates a troubling situation to you, that person may just want to feel heard and doesn't want you to offer a solution or an opposing view point. If you jump ahead in the listening process and begin to problem solve instead of continuing to listen for understanding, you may miss that she doesn't want you to offer a solution. In a situation like this, it is important to listen to the entire message, maybe pause and let everyone think for a minute about the speaker's message. If appropriate, you might name the emotion, "That sounds really stressful," which will help the speaker feel understood. Also, if you try to problem solve too soon instead of continuing to listen for understanding, you may end up not fully understanding the problem. This can result in a poor decision that negatively impacts the child.

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Narrator

Now let's see how the interaction during Mateo's IEP could be improved by implementing some effective listening and responding skills.

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Mrs. Fernandez

Now that we've discussed how Mateo is doing and have established goals for him, we can look at how best to address his educational needs.

Mrs. García

Yeah, I know what your idea of addressing his needs is. You want to send him out of his classroom (*voice breaks*) and put him in a separate classroom away from his friends.

Mrs. Fernandez

[pause] I can see how upsetting this is for you, and I hear you are concerned about Mateo changing classrooms. Can you tell me more about your concerns?

Mrs. García

I'm afraid that Mateo won't have as many chances to learn from and interact with his friends. He learns how to act from being with the other students. He's making friends and getting invited to parties. Having friends and being part of a community are going to help him survive in the world. A friend of mine has a child in that other classroom and she said that once students get placed in there, they stay there. I don't want Mateo to be separated from his friends and community he now feels a part of.

Mrs. Fernandez

I understand you have some reservations because you see the benefits Mateo has from interacting with his classmates and the experience your friend had.

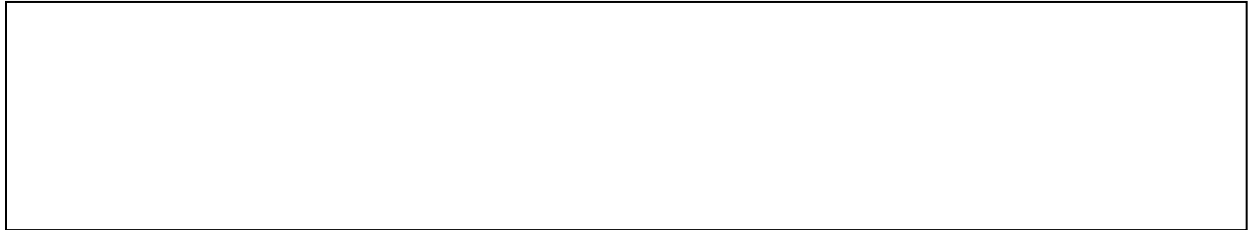
Mrs. García

Can you tell me why you think this is a good idea?

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Narrator

What listening and responding behaviors made the interaction go better this time?



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Narrator

Mrs. García's concerns about a potential new placement did not go away in the relatively brief interaction but her attitude shifted slightly as others in the room demonstrated effective listening and responsive skills. When team members showed genuine interest in Mrs. García's concerns and asked an open-ended question, Mrs. García likely felt heard and valued. Listening for understanding also gives the speaker a chance to clarify any misunderstandings and helps the IEP team solve problems together. Listening for understanding can also prevent many conversations from escalating into highly emotional conflicts. For more information and strategies on managing and responding to emotions, check out the *Managing and Responding to Emotions* course of the *Working Together* Series.

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Narrator

Listening and responding is possibly the most important skill set needed for families and educators working together and through conflict to support students. This course provides a number of key strategies to listen for understanding and respond in ways that can show the speaker you are hearing and understanding their message. In lesson one, strategies given to help families and educators listen for understanding included: keeping an open mind; holding off on making any judgments; and listening carefully for what might be behind the message.

Slide 16

Narrator

One strategy for listening without judgment is to focus on the concerns the speaker shares. Can you remember the other strategies that can be used to listen without judgment?



Slide 17

Narrator

In lesson 2, key strategies were provided to help families and educators respond in ways that show the speaker that the message is being heard and understood. These strategies include: reflective listening, asking open-ended questions to learn more, and using silence strategically.

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Narrator

The lesson also covered some behaviors to avoid, such as interrupting. Can you remember other behaviors to avoid?



Slide 19

Narrator

You've completed Lesson 2, the final lesson in the *Listening and Responding* course.