

URBAN CONFESSIONAL

A FREE LISTENING MOVEMENT

PARTNER GUIDE

WE BELIEVE

People need to be heard. There is value in simply listening to someone.

OUR MISSION

Is to listen. We make ourselves available for anyone who needs to be heard.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

We hold signs and allow people to talk, sing, dance, yell, cry, and share with us.

ARE THERE RULES?

Rules? No. Guidelines? Yes. We call these the Keys to Listening.

DO WE GIVE ADVICE?

No.



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KEYS TO LISTENING

IMBALANCED CONVERSATION

Listening does not mean that you are silent. You are having an imbalanced conversation where most of the talking is coming from the person you are listening to. But feel free to ask questions (see below), offer verbal understanding, and most of all, empathetically agree.

EMPATHETIC AGREEMENT

We are not here to change anyone's mind. Avoid disagreeing with the speaker. If someone is saying things that you do not agree with or you find distasteful, search yourself for a greater understanding, smile, and be there for them. If they ask for your opinion simply say, "I'm only here to listen, but I think it's very interesting," or redirect the discussion back to them by complementing their intellect or passion for the issue. Then ask if there is anything else they feel passionately about.

NO BARRIERS

It is imperative that the speaker feel they have your entire attention. When someone approaches you, put your sign down and keep your arms uncrossed when possible. This sends the message that you are no longer available for anyone else and that you have committed to the person in front of you. Also, never use your phone or other devices, and avoid waving at or engaging with anyone else during your time with someone. The chance to have all of someone's attention is a rare event. This is our speciality.

RESPECT THE SILENCE

When moments of silence happen, allow them to happen. Resist the urge to fill the silence. It is often in these moments that the person will say what they have been scared to say, the thing that is weighing heaviest on their hearts. Stay there for them in the silence, and be patient. Let them fill it.

URBAN CONFSSIONAL PRINCIPLES

THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT GUIDE OUR LISTENING. OUR MINDSET.

- We are passive opportunities for people to share. Try not to approach people; allow them to come to you.
- We are here for them. That's all. No agenda, no strings attached.
- We do not record anyone for use in future projects. This is the only moment that matters. Journaling after the experience is encouraged and performances based on a remembered experience are acceptable. But to respect the integrity of the project, we don't record anyone while they share with us.

LISTENING ETIQUETTE

A FEW THINGS THAT HELP US MAINTAIN A BASIC STANDARD OF LISTENING.

- Remove your sunglasses if possible.
- Make eye contact. We listen with our eyes and our hearts.
- While waiting, smile and make eye contact with passers-by. Be approachable.
- If you are asked to move from your location, move graciously. Do not engage in territorial conflict with authorities.
- Never assume anything about anyone. Always let them volunteer information.
- You do not have to give money to people who ask for it. Listening is your contribution.
- Always offer to sit with someone if you feel they need more focused attention.
- Do not stand in groups of more than three. Too many people in one spot is intimidating.

THE IMBALANCED CONVERSATION: QUESTIONS

When listening, we practice the art of the Imbalanced Conversation: 80% listening, 20% redirected responses. Here are the four types of questions that will redirect the conversation back to the person sharing and maintain the proper imbalance between the speaker and the listener.

OPEN QUESTIONS

These are often the most important questions. Open Questions require the speaker to think and respond. Often used to initiate contact with a curious would-be speaker (*How are you doing? Where are you from?*), they can also be used to redirect the conversation when the speaker asks you questions. For example, if a speaker asks you about your beliefs in God, you can redirect the conversation by asking the Open Question, "What are your beliefs in God?" or "What does God mean to you?" This communicates a genuine interest in their beliefs and stories and helps to maintain an Imbalanced Conversation.

THE IMBALANCED CONVERSATION: QUESTIONS (continued)

CLARIFYING QUESTIONS

These are questions that ask the speaker to clarify points of their “confession.” Questions like, “*When did this happen?*”, “*How old were you?*”, “*Did you say you were home when this happened?*”, are the natural result of interest in their story. They show the speaker that you are actively listening and are truly interested in understanding the details of their “confession.”

LEADING QUESTIONS

These questions can be used to lead the speaker into more (or less) detail about their story. They are more specific than Open Questions and are best used to encourage the speaker to continue speaking about a particular topic—especially when you notice that they want to talk about something, but are a little nervous to get started. Questions like, “*How is your relationship with your wife now?*”, “*Have you been looking for work lately?*”, let the speaker know that it’s ok to continue talking about a difficult topic. They communicate trust and can inspire courage in the speaker.

POSITIVE REDIRECT

These questions can be used when you notice a speaker cycling into hopelessness. These are the questions to use after a degree of trust and intimacy has been established. Questions like, “*What are you grateful for?*” and “*What’s the best thing about your life?*”, can give the speaker a new perspective and help stop a downward spin. Often, if the speaker is struggling with depression or despair, these questions serve to redirect their mindset and help to insure that they leave you in a better place than when they approached you.

HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

YOU WILL BE ASKED A LOT OF SPECIFIC QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED. HERE ARE SOME GOOD WAYS TO FRAME YOUR ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS.

Q: What are you doing this for?

A: For you.

Q: So, why are you doing this?

A: Well, we believe people have a lot on their hearts, and we want to be there if they need to get things off their chest.

Q: Are you recording me or looking for material?

A: Not at all. I’m just here for you.

Q: Can I have your number?

A: I’m really just here to listen, but if you want to come back next week, I’ll be here again.

Q: Can I have some money?

A: I’m just here to listen; that’s my contribution.

These are not intended to be stock answers, just suggestions. The first three, however, are the cornerstones of our mission and intention.

SAFETY

THE NATURE OF WHAT WE ARE DOING MEANS THAT WE MAY BE IN NEIGHBORHOODS WHERE SAFETY NEEDS TO BE A CONSCIOUS CONSIDERATION.

- Stay in groups of two to three.
- Because men are apt to come directly to female listeners, make sure everyone is in eye contact of other groups.
- Dress casually. Don't look "nice."
- Don't bring bags or any personal things to the event.
- Keep an eye on your surroundings.
- Do not allow anyone to use your phone.
- If you feel uncomfortable with someone, politely suggest that you include another listener.
- You can always say NO to someone if they ask you to do something.

HOW TO DESCRIBE US

As you listen, you may want to tell certain people about Urban Confessional. Tell them this:

"We're part of a movement that believes people need to be heard."

If they want more info, invite them to visit:

- **urbanconfessional.org**
- **facebook.com/urbanconfessional**
- **twitter.com/UCFreeListening**
- **instagram.com/urbanconfessional**

Ok. Go listen.