

EMPATHIC LISTENING EXERCISE

Directions: You have been paired with another student whose views on a controversial issue are very different than yours. Your goal is to understand the other student's point of view (i.e., understand both the reasons given for the opinion and how he/she believes the opinion developed). The other student's goal is to understand your point of view. Please follow the procedure described below. Please do not argue or debate. Please do not evaluate the other student's opinions. Avoid both verbal and nonverbal expression of evaluation. If you believe that the other student is arguing or being evaluative of your opinions, simply tell them so. If you or the other student is unable to follow these guidelines, or if you are frustrated by the exercise, please return to the classroom to discuss any such problems with your instructor.

Procedure:

A. Learning the Other's reasons

1. Decide who will speak first.
2. First speaker explains reasons for his/her opinion.
3. Second speaker paraphrases first speaker's reasons.
4. First speaker verifies or clarifies second speaker's interpretations.
5. Second speaker explains reasons for his/her opinion.
6. First speaker paraphrases second speaker's reasons.
7. Second speaker verifies or clarifies first speaker's interpretations.

B. Learning how the Other's opinions developed

1. Second speaker describes how his/her background and personal experiences influenced development of opinions.
2. First speaker paraphrases second speaker's description.
3. Second speaker verifies or clarifies first speaker's interpretations.
4. First speaker describes how his/her background and personal experiences influenced development of opinions.
5. Second speaker paraphrases first speaker's description.
6. First speaker verifies or clarifies second speaker's interpretations.

C. Learning points of agreement

1. First speaker states any points of possible agreement between students.
2. Second speaker states any points of possible agreement.

Essay Question:

1. What issue did you discuss?
2. Summarize the other student's reasons for his/her opinion.
3. Summarize the other student's views about how his/her opinions developed.
4. What did you learn from this exercise?
5. Why is mutual perspective taking sometimes useful for reducing enmity and for de-escalation of conflict?

[This exercise was created by Linden Nelson. See second page for the survey used to identify students' opinions on controversial issues so as to create pairs of students with differing views. The matching of students holding conflicting opinions into pairs is done by the instructor prior to the exercise. The survey is completed during the class period prior to the day of the exercise.]

Controversial Issues

Please number from 1 to 7. For #2-7, please indicate how you feel about the issue using this scale:

1 = Strongly agree

2 = Agree

3 = Neutral or unsure

4 = Disagree

5 = Strongly disagree

6 = Do not want to discuss

1. Your name

2. Abortion should be illegal with few, if any, exceptions.

3. Handguns should be illegal except for use by security professionals and at shooting ranges.

**4. Teachers and students should be allowed to pray out loud during class in
public schools.**

**5. Homosexual couples should be allowed to marry, adopt children, and
have all the same legal rights as heterosexual couples.**

6. Smoking and possession of small amounts of marijuana should be legal.

**7. The penalty for conviction on drunk driving should be increased to three
months in prison for a first offense.**