

Using Dialogue: Words Matter!

Listen: Attend to the speaker and “listen” to meaning conveyed not just through words, but also through tone, body language, and context. Remember that you cannot “listen” and formulate a response at the same time.

Reflect: Think about what you have heard and also about your own assumptions, values, and experiences, which may have influenced what was heard.

Ask: Ask about assumptions, about what information or experiences have influenced the speaker’s views, or about your own interpretation. For example, you can say to the speaker, “This is what I understood. Is that what you meant?”

Invite: When you speak, invite a response with open questions such as: “What do you think?”, “Is there additional information I should consider?”, “What experiences do you have that should be considered here?” Then be prepared to listen.

Acknowledge: Acknowledge emotions and messages that are shared. “I hear that . . .”, “I understand that this is difficult . . .”, “I appreciate . . .”

Accept: Accept that the speaker’s thoughts are what his or her thoughts are and that the speaker has information, experience, values, and judgments that are worth considering.

Share: In a non-confrontational way, share the information, experience, values, and perspectives that you have. When doing so, use the connectors, “and” or “although”, rather than “but”. Example: Instead of “Yes, but . . .”, use “I understand you believe . . . *and* I have had a different experience. . .”

Focus Forward: Perception is often said to be 9/10ths of reality. The odds of changing another’s reality by arguing over the past (or even the present) are very low. The odds of finding common ground are substantially higher if you can focus the dialogue on how you would like it to be going forward.

Dialogue: A set of communication patterns that promote sharing of perspectives, information, and values in a manner that leads to mutual understanding rather than debate.

