



Workshop Description: This workshop includes practice for understanding how to successfully engage in active listening techniques. Successful implementation of this workshop will help youth program staff to better hear and listen to youth and understand how they can support youth's emotion regulation to strengthen the program overall.

Preparation Time: The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

Instruction Time: It will take approximately 70 to 80 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

Materials:

- Projector or video display to watch Julian Treasure's Ted Talk
- Large blank white sheets of paper, enough for groups of 3 or 4
- Markers
- Two large blank white sheets of paper or a whiteboard

Preparation Instructions: You should read the content related to this topic on the Emotion Regulation and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to Emotion Regulation and Youth Program Staff. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

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| 1. <i>Understanding Emotion Regulation,</i> | 6. <i>Understanding and Practicing Inquiry,</i> |
| 2. <i>Development of Executive Functioning,</i> | 7. <i>Understanding and Practicing Acceptance,</i> |
| 3. <i>Understanding Peer Relationships</i> | 8. <i>Understanding and Practicing Problem-Solving, and</i> |
| 4. <i>Understanding Emotion Regulation – Staff,</i> | 9. <i>Understanding and Practicing Cognitive Reappraisal.</i> |
| 5. <i>Understanding and Practicing Active Listening,</i> | |

Knowledge: Understanding Active Listening and Inquiry

Youth learn about emotion regulation by observing other people's emotion regulation (within interactions with their family and others like their friends, peers, and other adults)³⁶ and through emotion coaching (*fostering awareness and reflection (i.e., acceptance), reinterpreting the meaning of emotions (i.e., cognitive reappraisal), and encouraging problem-solving*³⁵).

Although parents and families often provide the first examples and lessons for youth regarding emotion regulation, adolescence is a time when youth begin to exercise more independence and interact in environments beyond their home (like school, extracurricular activities, youth programs, etc.). In these new environments, youth are exposed to and learn from other adults (like youth program staff) and their peers. The youth program provides a laboratory for youth to learn and practice skills like emotion



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regulation and youth program staff can play a unique role in youth's lives. Adult-youth relationships offer opportunities for supporting positive social norms around emotion regulation, and program staff have regular opportunities to influence how youth see themselves engaging with the world through the examples the adults provide.

Youth program staff have an opportunity to help youth learn to manage negative emotions when they occur. When staff provide support and guidance to youth to help them manage and understand their emotions, they are providing emotion coaching.⁶¹ In order to be successful in this emotion coaching, staff need to practice active listening and inquiry.

Emotion coaching involves helping youth identify their own emotions and develop solutions and strategies for how they manage what they feel so they can achieve their goals. A positive youth development program offers participants a safe place to practice healthy emotion regulation strategies. As youth grow more confident in their regulation abilities, youth program staff can offer challenges to help them further learn and grow. For example, a youth who is afraid to speak in front of their peers might be challenged to give a demonstration or presentation on a favorite topic. When youth understand how to manage their strong emotions, they will be less likely to quit the program or disengage with the other youth in the program.³⁵

Two skills that are critical for effective emotion coaching are active listening and inquiry. Active listening is a technique that involves hearing, understanding, and reflecting on information as well as providing the speaker with cues to let them know their message is being received. Inquiry involves learning how to ask open-ended questions to probe the speaker to think deeper about a topic or emotion.

Objectives:

- Understand elements of active listening
- Learn how to employ elements of active listening

Introduction (5 minutes):

- Describe emotion coaching as three techniques (fostering awareness and reflection, suggesting strategies, and encouraging problem solving) that the group will be exploring in the next several workshops.
- Convey that before you start working on those three techniques it is important to ensure staff understand the skills that support effective emotion coaching (awareness, active listening, and inquiry).
 - What to say: "Today we are going to practice active listening skills. These skills are important as you coach youth through their emotions. Using active listening skills will help you understand the emotions a youth may be feeling while supporting self-reflection. In addition, you will have critical information to help with problem-solving through the process."
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
 - What to say: "To start, we are going to talk about what you know about active listening and explore where there may be gaps in your knowledge."



Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask the participants to share what they know about active listening. You may need to assist with getting the discussion started using the background information provided in the Knowledge section of the workshop plan.
- Ask the participants if they have any questions about active listening they would like answered or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses.

Activities:

Activity: *Understanding Active Listening* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Understanding Active Listening* activity:
 - What to say: “When practicing emotion coaching with youth there are two skills that should be refined: active listening and inquiry. Inquiry helps youth expand on their thoughts through use of open-ended questions. Active listening is a set of skills that includes focus, acknowledgement, and body language. To help get us started, we are going to watch a Ted Talk by Julian Treasure called “5 ways to listen better” and discuss the steps he outlines. The goal of this activity is to make sure we are all working from the same definition of active listening.”
- Lead the *Understanding Active Listening* activity:
 - Watch the Ted Talk by Julian Treasure titled “5 ways to listen better” (8 minutes) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSohjYQI2A>
 - Lead a brief discussion about RASA. Ask the participants to define each of the letters and put in their own words what each of the words mean.
 - Receive** – Pay attention to the person
 - Appreciate** – Acknowledge
 - Summarize** – “So” is the most important word in a listener’s repertoire
 - Ask** – Ask questions afterward
 - On the white board or large piece of paper, write out the various definitions given for each of the letters.
 - Transition to the next activity by explaining that the first three letters in Julian Treasure’s mnemonic device RAS (for Receive, Appreciate, and Summarize) are about active listening, and the last letter, A for Ask, is about inquiry. In this workshop, we are focusing on active listening and will address the last, A for Ask, in the workshop on Inquiry.

Activity: *Focusing or Receiving* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Focusing or Receiving* activity:
 - What to say: “In this activity we are going to brainstorm ways that we can be present, focus, and receive messages when we are practicing active listening. Being present or focusing allows us to listen with our ears, our eyes, our mouth, our face, our mind, our heart, and our body. The goal of this activity is to help us think about the different ways we can listen to what a person says.”
- Lead the *Focusing or Receiving* activity:
 - Divide the participants into small groups of 3 or 4 individuals and provide each group with a large piece of paper and a set of markers.



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- Ask the group to draw an image of a person on the paper and then describe what they think it means to listen with their ears, eyes, face, mind, and body.
- It is ok for groups to have more than one response for each aspect of listening.
- Ask each group to share what they think it means to listen with their ears. Then ask each group to share what they think it means to listen with their eyes, etc. until all aspects of listening have been covered.
- Cover these possible responses if one of the groups does not mention them:
 - Face: Face the person fully, expression reflects the situation, expression reflects acceptance (no judgement)
 - Mouth: Be silent, do not interrupt, acknowledge receipt response
 - Eyes/Face: Demonstrate complete concentration
 - Eyes: Watch for nonverbal cues
 - Heart/Body: Listen to your own emotion and intuition (how does it feel/what does your gut say?)
 - Mind: Be inquisitive—watch, listen, and wonder in what they are saying. Do not jump to conclusions or judge. Think about the message beyond the message (saying one thing but conveying something else—I’m important, I feel bad, etc.)
- Lead a discussion about strategies for focusing and receiving in a youth center. Ask questions to frame the discussion:
 - What makes it difficult to be focused and open and to really listen to youth during programs and activities?
 - What are some successful strategies you have used when you need to fully focus on a youth and there are distractions or interruptions all around you?
- Cover these possible responses if one of the participants does not mention them:
 - Put aside distracting thoughts.
 - Practice focusing by repeating the speaker’s words in your mind as they speak.
 - Ignore distractions.
 - If other youth or program staff try to engage during the conversation, excuse yourself and consider moving to another part of the room to continue.
 - Do not prepare a rebuttal or a solution. Engaging with a youth doesn’t mean you solve their problems but rather that you help them find solutions for themselves. Further details about youth program staff verbal responses can be found in the workshop on Inquiry.
 - Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
 - Allow for silence.
 - Don’t interrupt with counterarguments. Sometimes the message the speaker is trying to convey is emotionally charged, and sometimes they may bring up strong emotions in you. If you find yourself responding with a strong emotion, say so, but also ask for more information. “I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I think you just said is...Is that what you meant?”

Activity: *Body Language* (15 minutes)

- Describe the *Body Language* activity:



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- What to say: “In this activity we are going to practice reading body language. We will try to understand each other’s emotions and what we are feeling based on each other’s expressions, eye contact, posture, and gestures. The goal of this activity is to help us understand how body language impacts our ability to feel heard and how this might translate to youth in the program.”
- Lead the *Body Language* activity:
 - Divide the participants into pairs (Group A and B). Group A will remain in the room and Group B will leave the room. Each will get a set of instructions.
 - After Group B leaves the room, instruct Group A that when Group B returns they will listen to their partner, but not speak. Every time their partner says something that evokes their “inner voice” they will become distracted for 5 seconds. This may mean they turn away their face, raise their hand, stare at a button on their shirt, or some other physical change to their demeanor. Explain that the inner voice is when they want to ask a question or the speaker makes them think about something off the topic. They will do this for the entire conversation, no speaking, no nodding, and no affirming language—just the distracted behavior followed by a return to focus.
 - Instruct Group B that they will need to return to the room and speak to their partner about something positive that interests them. It could be a hobby, a book they just read, an interesting story they heard, or any other positive event that has happened to them in the last 6 months. They will have 3 minutes to talk.
 - Reunite the group and tell them they have 3 minutes to talk.
 - At the end of the 3 minutes
 - Ask the members of Group B how they felt while talking to Group A. What emotions did the conversation evoke? Common responses include: not feeling listened to, feeling confused, losing the train of thought.
 - Ask the members of Group A how they felt while talking to Group B. What emotions did the conversation evoke? Common responses include: awkwardness, felt bad for their partner.
 - While the group returns to their seats, ask these processing questions:
 - What can the speaker’s body language tell us about their emotions? Are they agitated, sad, excited, or exhibiting some other emotion?
 - What parts of the body might give us clues about what the speaker is feeling?
 - Their facial expression, eye contact, posture, and gestures, etc.
 - When are sometimes when you speak to youth and they give you their full attention?
 - When do you think you might NOT feel awkward or bad during a conversation when you ignore or are distracted?
 - When you don’t realize you are doing it or you lack respect for the person you are speaking to.

Activity: *Positive Body Language Practice* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Positive Body Language Practice* activity:
 - What to say: “In this activity we are going to practice sending positive body language messages. Using the experience from the previous activity and our discussions, we will



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try to send positive messages using expressions, eye contact, posture, and gestures. The goal of this activity is to help us understand how to use body language to reinforce that you are listening.”

- Lead the *Positive Body Language Practice* activity:
 - Ask the participants in Group A and B to find a new partner.
 - Instruct Group A that they will now describe what they want from a vacation without mentioning a destination. They will have 3 minutes to provide as much detail as they can but cannot name a specific place.
 - Instruct Group B to practice active listening skills. They should listen carefully to everything that is being said and pay attention to the non-verbal cues.
 - After the 3 minute presentation, Group B will summarize their partner’s vacation location preference, and then make a pitch for a specific destination that meets those criteria.
 - After the Group B pitch, Group A partners can provide a review of Group B’s pitch and how well they demonstrated active listening behaviors.
 - Then swap roles and repeat.
 - After both groups have practiced, process the activity by asking the large group these questions:
 - How does the listener’s body language tell the speaker they are important?
 - An active listener sits or stands comfortably, body turned toward the speaker, eyes on the speaker’s face, and mind focused on the words and actions of the speaker.
 - What are some actions that tell the speaker that they are not important?
 - If we multi-task (i.e., text, browse, read, write, etc.) while they are talking.
 - When might it be OK to continue an activity and practice active listening?
 - If you are engaged in an activity with the youth and it is part of how or why the youth is opening up to you, then continue the activity, but focus your attention on the words, not the activity. For example, if you are playing basketball and a youth needs your active listening skills, continue the game, but pause as the youth speaks and give your full mental and physical attention as appropriate.

Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the participant responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the participants what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?” and “How could you use these strategies with youth?”

Resources:

None



Sources:

TED. (2011, July 29). *5 ways to listen better*, Julian Treasure [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSohjIYQI2A>

Active Listening: The Art of Empathetic Conversation. (2019, January 10). Retrieved from <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/active-listening/>

The *Body Language* and *Positive Body Language* activities were adapted from Norman, B. (2018, November 27). Trainers' tips: Active listening exercises. Retrieved from <https://www.trainingzone.co.uk/develop/cpd/trainers-tips-active-listening-exercises>.