

A bold idea

There seems to be a yearning for space, a chance to be heard. Many of us are seeking to understand more about what's going on, and where we might go next. If we are going to find the most sustainable and humane ways to move forward from the current Covid-19 crisis and more, then don't we need a better quality of conversations? Getting on with creating these spaces, keeping it simple yet meaningful, seems like a bold idea.

Could it really be as simple as listening to each other more, creating more space to listen and be heard? Well, we think that it would be a very good start.

What if we gathered together in a space and shared with each other: how we are feeling, what we are thinking, and what we are hoping for?

Such space for listening does not give us the 'answer'. What it does is give us the breathing space: to find out and share what is going on for each of us; and, to hear where others are too.

A structured space

We have come up with a simple, structured process which creates a space in which we each have an equal opportunity to share our thoughts and feelings, and to experience an equality of listening; there is no hierarchy. It is about starting where we are; sharing what is going on for each of us. We all need to be aware to look after our self in this space, as we might find it enables thoughts and feelings to be expressed in ways that can feel moving, or even a little unsettling.

The structure of three rounds of timed contributions (2 minutes per person, in each round) provides a safe and confidential space in which we can each choose to open up and explore our ideas and feelings. Each one of us takes a turn, in order, and in so doing, we each experience a level of listening, an equal chance to share, and a spirit of appreciation. It's always okay to pass in any particular round. The core principles of the approach are to stick to the timings and a set running order, thereby ensuring the equality of space and safety each person experiences.

Given that we are each sharing our personal responses in each of the rounds, it is really helpful if we join the call from a quiet space where we won't be interrupted.

A chance to create a different future

We believe that Spaces for Listening could help to create the conditions for better conversations – in our teams, throughout our organisations, across society. The conversations which need to be happening about the work, societal change, and the 'what next' after Covid-19.

These Spaces for Listening are unedited. Our experience is that they enable us to go on and have conversations elsewhere which are more real, purposeful, and meaningful. It all starts with the quality of our listening, and the quality of our appreciation for each other. Better conversations lead to more effective relational working.

An experience to spark change

We believe that the best way to understand the quality and potential of this simple, structured approach is to experience it. We offer the Space for Listening as a one-off experience with *this* particular gathering of people.

After this experience, if it feels useful, we could each choose to experiment further with the approach and bring it into our ways of working:

- In our own team(s), sharing what's going on for each of us and developing a simple, structured practice of listening.
- With a group of people who choose to come together for regular Spaces for Listening.
- In our groups or regular meetings.

An outline of the structure

There is a structure in the form of listening rounds, held by a facilitator (the facilitator is also an equal participant). There is a prompt for each round. The facilitator will let us know whose turn it is next. Each of us will get 2 minutes in turn, timed and called out by the facilitator. After the first round, we will stick to the same order of people in rounds 2 and 3. Each of us can use our time to say whatever we like; at 2 minutes, the facilitator will indicate that time is up, and we'll move on to the next person.

If any of us want to pass, when it is our turn, this is completely fine; at the end of the round the facilitator will come back to any of us who have 'passed' to see if we now want to say anything. We do not interrupt each other or open up into a general conversation. We can choose, if we like, to comment on what others have said within our own allotted 2 minutes.

- In Round 1, the prompt is: How are you and what is on your mind right now....
- In Round 2, the invitation is to share your reflections and feelings now, and in the light of what you have heard in Round 1....
- In Round 3, the invitation is to share one thing you might like to take forwards, and also to offer some appreciation to any particular thoughts or any aspects of the call that have resonated with you...

At the end of Round 3, the session ends.

A few words on the facilitators...

We have experienced the benefits of Space for Listening. We are not setting ourselves up as 'experts'. We just know that listening, sharing what's going on for us, and being heard are fundamentally helpful. We have trusted the relational connections we have made on Twitter, taken a risk, and put these ideas into practice. We believe that more space for listening can make a fundamental difference to the quality of our conversations – and our chances for making real and sustainable social change.

To find out more, or offer any feedback, please contact Brigid Russell (brigidb@btinternet.com / [@brigidrussell51](https://twitter.com/brigidrussell51)) or Charlie Jones (charlie.jones@nbt.nhs.uk / [@charlie_psych](https://twitter.com/charlie_psych)). You can read more in these three blogs: [Spaces for Listening](#) (Nov 2020) [Trust in the spaces between us](#) (October 2021) [Keeping it simple](#) (December 2022)