



Session Two: Asking and Listening

Open Ended Communication

Begin this session by exploring the art of asking open-ended questions. Begin by asking a series of yes/no questions:

- Do you feel stressed at school? Do you think Advisory is the best part of the day?
- Is there too much homework at GWC?
- Do you think that your last essay in English was graded fairly?

Ask the Peer Leaders whether the answers led to much dialogue or thought-provoking conversation? Was it interesting or easy to react to? Using open-ended communication, using questions that require more than one word answers, can help. Think about using the words what or how. Think about keeping the conversation going by asking follow-up questions and open-ended responses.

Work as a group to create a list of open-ended questions that could lead to a worthwhile discussion. Some examples might include:

- What five words best describe you?
- How would you describe the culture at GWC? What would you like to change?
- Do you think that Advisory can have an impact on life at GWC?

Ask the group how did that discussion compare to the first round of questions?

Non-Judgmental Communication: Empathetic Listening

Next, explore with your Peer Leaders the concept of empathetic listening, sometimes called active listening or reflective listening. By definition, it is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding, trust and respect, and creates an environment of sharing – all key aspects to an effective and functional advisory experience for all.

What is empathy? It's the ability to project oneself into the personality of another person in order to better understand that person's emotions or feelings. Through empathic listening the listener lets the speaker know, "I understand your problem and how you feel about it, I am interested in what you are saying and I am not judging you."



Experts offer these guidelines for empathic listening:

1. Be attentive. Be interested. Be alert and not distracted. Create a positive atmosphere through nonverbal behavior. Indicate you are listening by providing brief non-committal responses like "uh-huh" and "I see." Non-verbal acknowledgements include head nodding, an open and relaxed body expression and maintaining eye contact
2. Offer invitations to say more, like, "Tell me about it," or "I'd like to hear more about that."
3. Don't ask a lot of questions. They can give the impression you are "grilling" the speaker.
4. Act like a mirror -- reflect back what you think the speaker is saying and feeling.
5. Don't discount the speaker's feelings by using stock phrases like "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow."

Student Activity: Sharing My Truth

Imagine being able to share your dreams, your concerns and your hopes without worrying about being judged or laughed at. Ask yourself the questions below (they go from easy-to-share to more personal topics.) Circle or write down your answers. When you imagine sharing your truth with someone you trust, how do you feel? Relieved? Connected? Shy? There are no wrong feelings; everything we feel helps us to learn about ourselves.

- Which do you like better: a pen, pencil or computer keyboard?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Do you have a brother or sister, or are you an only child? Are you the oldest, youngest or in between? Would you change that if you could?
- If you could spend a day with anyone in the world, who would it be and why?
- What's the most adventurous thing you have ever done?
- Name one thing about yourself that people would be surprised to learn.
- What job would you have if you knew that you could not fail?
- What is one inner quality about yourself that you would like to change?
- What is your biggest fear in life? How could you overcome it?
- What is your happiest memory?
- With whom could you share these answers and know that you would not be judged?