

# The Weekly JAM

It's been said that we were given two ears and one mouth, and we should use them in that proportion. At YES! Jams, we have seen how deep listening is the bedrock for the community -- to make connections, learn and grow in understanding and leadership. Try this Listening Exercise out with your family, community, organization and/or movement gatherings, and let us know how it works for you!

## LISTENING EXERCISE

**Time: 20-45 minutes**

**Suggested Group Size: any size**

**Materials: none**

### **WHY?**

To cultivate our listening skills and capacities is to cultivate our skills and capacities as a change-maker, conflict transformer, leader and human being. The better the quality of our listening, the more able we are to feel the other person, and therefore to make the profound connections which enable us to learn and collaborate. This exercise gives us the ability to reflect on the quality of our own listening and to support another person to do the same. It also lets us experience the value of sharing our stories from the heart. The result is often profound insights and connection.

### **HOW?**

Invite your group to divide into pairings. When they are settled, ask one person to be designated as Tea; the other to be Coffee (*or you can play with any other pairing you like: Apple-Banana; Sky-Earth; maybe something from the theme, geography or cultural milieu of your group*). Ask the Teas to raise their hands. They will go first and are invited to share a story with Coffee. It could be the story of their first kiss, the story of their birth, a story from their first travel alone -- any true story from their life with a beginning, middle and end, and that can be told in three minutes or less.

Coffee will listen as Tea is talking; they will not talk, ask questions or comment -- only listen. When Tea is finished, Coffee will tell Tea's story back to him/her, as though it is *their own* story. That is, Coffee will speak in the "I". For example, if Tea said, "I went to the game, and I met my best friend there...", then, in telling it back, Coffee would also say, "I went to the game, and I met my best friend there..." The re-telling also takes about three minutes.

When Coffee has finished re-telling Tea's story, then Tea has the opportunity to give feedback on how it felt to have their story re-told to them. They may also make observations about Coffee's listening skills, whether they felt heard, or they felt assumptions were made, or whatever else. Coffee then has a chance to reflect on how the process was for them, what they noticed about their listening, how it felt to retell the story back. This reflection takes about three to five minutes.

When the whole process is complete, then the partners switch places. Now, it is Coffee's chance to tell a story from their life to Tea, and for Tea to listen closely.

When Coffee has completed, then Tea will re-tell Coffee's story in the "I", as though it is *their own* story. Lastly, Coffee and Tea have a chance to reflect on the experience of telling their story, hearing their story retold, sharing the story back, and on Tea's listening skills.

The facilitator can give an overview of the whole process and also give timing reminders at each three-minute mark about what is happening now, so as not to confuse people -- especially for the first round. The facilitator definitely needs to let everyone know upfront that it is a listening exercise, which will enable everyone to practice listening and learn more about themselves and each other as listeners.

The whole exercise takes about 20 minutes total (three minutes for Tea to tell; three minutes for Coffee to re-tell; four minutes for reflection on the experience; and then three minutes for Coffee to tell; three minutes for Tea to re-tell; four minutes for reflection on the experience).

When the pairs are complete, you may also want to reconvene the whole group for a 15-25 minute conversation on what they learned about themselves as listeners and storytellers, as well as any other insights they had from the exercise.