



NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS QUAKERS

Exploring our Identity as Friends

Estimated total duration: 2 to 2.5 hours

Understanding our identity as Friends is essential to any consideration of the relationship with the wider world of Friends, including FUM. Heart-Centered Listening provides a context wherein Friends can listen deeply to one another as we speak to our spiritual journey and our understanding of what it means to be a Friend. It is our hope that both the speaking and the listening will strengthen bonds among Friends, and provide a foundation of mutual understanding that will benefit individuals and the Meeting community as a whole.

Heart-Centered Listening is a useful format for many purposes. This resource is offered as a way to start the process of discernment. You may also wish to come back to this format later on in your process, using queries of your own making.

How to use this packet

We recommend that you choose a small group of people to organize and facilitate the program. We have provided a sample agenda, which your organizers can build upon and adapt as needed. Time allotments will vary according to the scope of participation. We recommend that you do *not* change the time allotments for speaking and listening until you have experienced the recommended timing.

Three hand-outs are included at the end of this document.

1. Ground Rules (p. 4)
2. Description of Heart-Centered Listening (p. 5)
3. L.O.V.E. Approach to Listening (p. 6)

Agenda

You may want to tweak this depending on the number of people, context (in-person or virtual), and time available.

25 minutes: Opening Worship

- Share queries in advance, to give people a chance to sit with the queries in worship.

10 minutes: Description of Heart-Centered Listening

Pick one person to explain how Heart-Centered Listening works to all participants.

- Share the Ground Rules
- Share the description of Heart-Centered Listening
- Share the L.O.V.E. handout
- Share the queries in a way that allows folks to refer back to them while doing the exercise (some options: chart paper, handouts, on screen, in the chat).

Approx. 60 minutes: Heart-Centered Listening in triads

Designate a timekeeper who will alert all the groups when it's time to move on.

Timing:

1. 15 minutes (Speaker 1): Sound chime (or send message into the break-out rooms)
2. 5 minutes (Listener 1 reflects): Sound chime (or send message into the break-out rooms)

Repeat 3 times, so that each member of the triad takes a turn in each role.

How to do it?

Form groups of three.

In each group of three, one person will be the speaker, one person the listener, and one person the holder. The speaker will respond to the queries, speaking for 15 minutes. During this time the listener engages in active listening without speaking or responding to the speaker. As the listener, try not to process what the speaker is saying or make connections. Just listen. The holder is holding the space for the speaker and listener. This may look or feel a little like praying for others, holding people in the light, or something else. The holder may not really be listening to the words. The holder is present spiritually, as a grounding and holding presence, hoping for clear communication and full engagement from both the listener and speaker.

After 15 minutes have elapsed, the listener will reflect what they hear back to the speaker for 5 minutes. When the listener has done, this rotate the roles and repeat (i.e., the speaker becomes the holder, the holder the listener, and the listener the speaker). Do this until everyone has had a chance to perform each role.

15 minutes may seem like a very long time for some to speak on the queries. The idea is that this provides space to go deeper, beyond surface-level answers. It is all right if the

speaker pauses or reflects for a minute. In this case, keep attending to the speaker and holding them. As Quakers, we know that silence is also a form of expression.

Here are some examples of what the listener may say as they reflect. They may say “I heard you say xyz. I noticed when you spoke about that, your body did such-and-such. When I heard you say xyz, I noticed a sense of {feeling/emotion}.” The listener isn’t talking about how the speaker made the listener *feel*. Just what they noticed *about the speaker* as they were listening.

Queries

1. As I identify as a Friend, what are the critical elements of that identity for me?
2. If not all Quakers (in my meeting, or yearly meeting, or world-wide “Quakerdom”) agree with my definition, what am I afraid of losing? Do I feel diminished?
3. What—if anything—might be gained by including others who do not agree with my fundamental understanding of Friends?
4. How much of my spiritual life involves being part of a Friends meeting?

5 to 10 minutes: Transition back to whole group

This is a good time to provide a break. If meeting in person, the break will happen naturally as people transition from one activity to the next. If meeting virtually, let participants know that they can take a break now. They should not log out - just mute and turn off their camera for 5 or 10 minutes.

30 to 45 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Sharing in big group:

What did we hear? What did we learn? What surprised you? Remember that what people said in the small groups may be personal and confidential. Try to focus on *insights you gained* during the exercise rather than on specifics of what speakers said in the small groups.

Does anything surface with enough weight that it has value for the community to record and/or return to?

Credit: Heart-Centered Listening is based on the work of Niyonou Spann

Handout 1: Ground rules:

1. We practice embodying the Beloved Community we are seeking to create.
2. We all enter this work at different places and support and affirm each other in our own next steps.
3. We are each responsible for our own learning, boundaries, and participation. If we feel overwhelmed, we will take care of ourselves, ask for help, and/or step away if need be. Try to return if possible.
4. We use silence and requests for space as times of discernment and envisioning new ways of engaging; we do not use silence and requests for space to silence or shut down people, nor to avoid conflict.
5. Speak about your own experience: what do you most want others to understand about you? Avoid generalizations about others.
6. We keep what we hear confidential.
7. We are committed to our shared learning and growth and will engage with each other when things are challenging; we will ask for help when we need it with that engagement.

These are the ground rules used by Wellesley Meeting during their discernment process in 2019–2020.

Credit: Adapted from work done by Lisa Graustein.

Handout 2: Heart-Centered Listening at Four Levels

Heart-centered listening can be a profound experience for both the sharer and the listener. People yearn to be listened to and truly heard. Heart-centered listening allows people to experience acceptance and connection, and gain a sense that they are heard and loved. Listening to a person with your heart and giving them your complete attention, without trying to judge what they are saying, enables us to better hear them, gain a deeper understanding of them, and understand and appreciate what is important to that person at any given time.

Heart-centered listening happens at four specific levels:

1. The first is the level of **facts** or information. In general, this is listening at the content level. Content information is only a small part of most messages communicated to us at any one time.
2. A second level of listening involves the **energy** of how something is said or the tonality of the communication flow. Tonality is the manner of expression or mood in which a person articulates information.
3. The third level of listening is that of **meaning**. This involves not only listening to what is said, but also to the more elusive or deeper levels of what is meant.
4. The fourth level of listening involves **the person**. Really seeing them and “listening and attending with the ear of your heart.” When we attend to others in a caring and receptive way, which happens independent of the content being shared, the person being listened to feels you are caring and understand them. When a person feels cared for and understood, more than likely they will want to spend more time talking with you.

What are the intentions of heart-centered listening?

One intention of heart-centered listening is to “see the loving essence.” There is nothing we need to do for a person other than be engaged with our heart as we listen. There are no problems to solve or advice to give while listening with our heart. We are in our loving being, accepting all of the beauty of the individual sharing with us.

Another important intention of heart-centered listening is to provide a safe place to share that allows a person to get to the point without wasting precious time. This safe place is of an unconditionally loving attitude. When we choose to build a relationship based upon understanding, respect, concern, and interest in a person, we enhance one’s ability to share. This loving, supportive relationship results in shared intimacy.

Heart-centered listening is an attitude of willingness and care that is based on being completely available and present right here and now. By focusing on all four levels of listening, you demonstrate your commitment and sincerity in really wanting to give someone “the ear of your heart” and lovingly give them the dignity of their experience.

Most important, setting the intention to be supportive and in a place of unconditional loving, encourages the sharer in opening their heart. When we quietly listen with our heart it facilitates one to find the inner wisdom of their own heart. In doing so, it allows an individual to experience their ability to effectively respond to their own situations. Heart-centered listening is trusting that all we need to do is listen.

Heart-Centered Listening

Heart-Centered Listening is allowing oneself to see the essential humanity in others and accept them as they are –

L

Listen

Attentive and focused
Present for the person speaking

O

Observe

Note tone, emotions, and body language
Pay attention to the energy of speech

V

Verify

Feed back what you noticed as you listened on multiple levels

E

Empathize

Appreciate their position
Support them in being fully heard
Come from your heart

Heart-Centered Listening is seeking to understand what the other is saying. It's about following another person as they speak in order to understand their true, deeper meaning. It's about allowing yourself to hear the message that may be beneath their literal words.