

## Listening Partnerships

We all experience "conversations," a two-way exchange of ideas and comments. Conversations are one of the most common ways in which we interact with one another. As we listen to each other during a conversation, we often find we are thinking about what we are going to say next, how we are going to rebut the position of the other, and/or about an incident in our own lives of which we are reminded.

Think of how seldom you are gifted by having someone give you complete, respectful, loving attention as you speak, with no attempt to "straighten you out," fix it, or tell you about what your experience reminds them of. Think of how seldom **you** have given that complete, respectful, loving attention to another. Imagine the joy of being able to listen to another without thinking about what you **should** say in reply, or what rebuttal you might make. Imagine the joy of being listened to, knowing you are not being judged, nor will you have to defend your words and/or actions.

A Listening Partnership provides that opportunity. It is a shared experience wherein first one partner and then the other *LISTENS*, giving the speaker complete, respectful, loving attention. Time is divided equally between the two individuals, with first one taking their turn and then the other. Listening Partnerships allow us to develop and sharpen skills which we already possess. We have all, at some time, given complete attention to another as that person struggled with a difficult situation or a problem they were trying to solve. For most of us, however, that is the uncommon occurrence. More often, we find ourselves in that two-way street called conversation. Conversations are, of course, completely appropriate in our everyday interactions with one another. Listening Partnerships are a specific opportunity to work on experiencing our feelings as we listen and are listened to in a thoughtful, intentional, loving and respectful manner.

Listening Partnerships allow us to help the other to take all the time needed to think, to talk and to feel. Listening Partnerships are a way of allowing in-depth exploration of feelings and thoughts around our experiences of the ways we have been hurt as we move through our lives. As we are listened to (given attention) by another human being, we can begin to heal the damage done to us and to forgive ourselves for the times we have hurt others. We can use Listening Partnerships to deepen understanding across genders, ethnicities, and class differences, learning to listen openly and warmly, to accept responsibility for our own feelings and actions, to value differences between individuals and between cultures and to decrease the potential for misunderstandings between humans.

### **Some important guidelines to remember:**

Confidentiality - never repeat what is said to you, either to anyone else or to the speaker, without first requesting permission

Do not tell the speaker about "your" experience in regard to what they have told you when you were their listener

No advice giving or interrupting

Stay focused on the speaker and their words

Divide time equally between the partners

Allow one to use all their time, then the other

Remember to provide loving, respectful, non-judgmental attention