

TOOL

Dyads



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What Do Our Norms Mean?

Purpose

This tool provides a structured way for two people to engage in focused, uninterrupted listening. Dyads are designed to support reflection, emotional processing, and deeper understanding by ensuring each person has equal time and full attention.

When to Use

Use this structure when individuals need space to think, process emotions, or reflect on an experience. It is especially useful in coaching, professional learning, or team settings where participants benefit from being heard without interruption or advice.

How to Use It

Pair participants and assign equal time for each person to speak while the other listens. The listener's role is to give full attention without interrupting, questioning, or offering advice. Then switch roles. You may provide a prompt to guide reflection, but the speaker may choose how to use their time, including diverging from the prompt or sitting in silence. This structure is most effective when both participants honor the guidelines and the intention of listening for the speaker's benefit.

Dyads

Based on the work by Julian Weissglass (1990)

Constructive listening is a form of communication where people can construct understandings and deal with their feelings. A dyad is the exchange of constructivist listening between two people.

I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for your doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit, so I do not ask questions for my information.

Dyad Guidelines

- Each person is given equal time to talk. Everyone deserves attention.
- The listeners do not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story. People are capable of solving their own problems.
- Confidentiality is maintained. (The listener doesn't talk about what the talker has said to anyone else or bring it up to the talker afterwards.) To be authentic, a person needs to be assured of confidentiality.
- The talkers do not criticize or complain about the listeners or about mutual colleagues during their time to talk. A person cannot listen well when they are feeling attacked or defensive. Problems are to be addressed in a different structure, based in dialogue.

A Few More Things

- The time belongs to the speaker. If the speaker wants to diverge from the suggested prompt, that's okay. If the speaker wants to sit in silence, that's okay!
- Sit facing each other, knee to knee, with nothing in your hands.
- Know that many people feel uncomfortable or awkward doing dyads when they first experience them; often this dissipates.

Appendix E: Activities for Meetings © Elena Aguilar, *The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools*. Jossey-Bass, 2016.

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