

SESSION D1: NOTES FOR THE FACILITATOR

Active listening is a basic skill in any process of change. It helps people feel that they are being heard and understood. Active listening helps people share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings openly. It is a way of showing others that their own ideas are valuable and important when it comes to solving their problems.

Listening well is about paying attention and respect. This is important in any human interaction, but especially in any process of organizational change where people may have different views about the issues being discussed. Mutual learning happens best in situations where people feel heard. This may be particularly important when talking with men about issues of masculinities, issues about which they may feel defensive or ashamed.

Active listening encourages a more open communication of experiences, thoughts and feelings. Active listening involves:

- ▶ Using body language to show interest and understanding. In most cultures, this will include nodding your head and turning your body to face the person who is speaking.
- ▶ Showing interest in and understanding of what is being said. This may include looking directly at the person who is speaking. In some places, such direct eye contact may not be appropriate until the people speaking and listening have established some trust.
- ▶ Listening not only to what is said, but to how it is said, by paying attention to the speaker's body language.
- ▶ Asking questions of the person who is speaking, in order to show that you want to understand.

In many cultures, men are accustomed to speaking and being listened to, especially by women. In many cultures women are expected to listen more and speak less, especially in the company of men. This sense of entitlement that men can feel to speak and be listened to is an important aspect of masculinities. By the same token, the lack of entitlement that women may feel when it comes to speaking openly about issues affecting them is an important aspect of femininities.

Think in broad terms about how 'body language' can be used to show that you are listening carefully to someone. None of these approaches to listening are culturally 'neutral'. In some cultures, making clear eye contact while listening may be interpreted as a sign of rudeness or intimacy, for example. The meaning of particular practices may be affected by the relative status of the people involved; a younger person maintaining direct eye contact with an older person while speaking may, once again, be interpreted as being disrespectful. It will be important to discuss these cultural aspects of active listening in ways that are specific and relevant to the context in which you are working.