

Holy Listening at Home

What is Holy Listening?

“When a person is fully present with another person: listening; not judging; not distracted; not analyzing; not diagnosing; and trusting that as they listen, God has joined them to offer wisdom, guidance and healing. As we enter into Holy Listening, God is present, and there is an air of holiness and sacredness” Rev. Dr. Leanne Hadley

The purpose of Holy Listening is to help children and teens know they are cared for, taken seriously, and that they are loved. The intention is to remind them they are wise and wonderful and to help them remember they have the inner wisdom of God to help them make good choices and to move toward health and healing.

Holy Listening is founded on the belief that we are all made in the image of God, the *imago dei*. Holy Listening looks for the image of God in the other person. The listener respects that image, treating the other person as a beloved child of God, even when the person is not reflecting that image.

Holy Listening involves listening skills, but adds the essential vertical dimension of the presence of God, a conversation of Three.

- Holy listening is taking the time to be quiet and listen to other people. To REALLY listen to other people. To listen to their words instead of composing our response. To take the time to digest what someone else is saying instead of thinking about what we will say next.
- Holy Listening accepts that person without judgment or evaluation, but with the openness of the spirit of God’s love, even when we may not feel love ourselves.
- Holy Listening does not try to “fix” a situation by offering advice or solutions, rather the listener allows the presence of God to provide the wisdom, guidance and healing.
- Holy Listening implies expecting God to act in the listening. It is God’s blessing in action.
- Holy Listening can be reinforced through the use of symbols.

What are Holy Listening Stones?

Holy Listening Stones are a tool to help children put their feelings, insights and thoughts into words. They also help adults to remember to listen to what children express.

What do the symbols mean?

The symbols on the stones were deliberately chosen to have several meanings and leave the interpretation of their meaning up to each child. For example, the stone that looks like the “tree” might be a symbol of new growth or strength. Or it can also be interpreted as a tree that is missing roots and ready to fall over. Or it can be seen as a bomb exploding. There is no correct meaning. Whatever the child shares is correct. W

Where/How can these be used?

The stones can be used in a variety of ways: They can be used as a check-in time for the kids. Simply ask them to choose a stone that describes how they are feeling or how their week was. They can be used to help upset children put their feelings into words. They are great to have on hand in case a child shares that someone they loved has died, their parents have split up or of they are having trouble in school. They can be used following the Bible Story lesson at Sunday School, or VBS. Each child takes a turn choosing a stone and sharing how it relates to what they heard or felt in the story.

Why are they called “Holy” listening stones?

These are called “Holy Listening Stones” because when we use them, we create a sacred and holy space and invite God to enter the space with us while the child shares. We are not the one who brings hope and healing... we allow God to do that! This work is based on the scripture found in Matthew 18:20, *“For where two are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”*

Why are these helpful?

Because, without time to process, children often struggle to put their feelings and reactions into words. The Holy Listening Stones allow time for quiet reflection and time for the children to gather their thoughts. Sometimes children simply do not have the vocabulary to describe their feelings. Instead of asking a child to “tell you how they are feeling,” you invite them to “show you.” Children often think in pictures and symbols and the stones help them express themselves in ways that they might not be able to with words alone.

Holy Listening Stones also help the children to look inside themselves and discover their own unique thoughts instead of trying to please the teacher with the answer they think the teacher wants to hear and they helps children to claim and commit to their own thoughts instead of feeling the pressure to mimic what their friends say.

Being a Holy Listener

1. Invite your child(ren) to sit and light the candle, reminding them that God is with us and hears us. God is the third Person in the Holy Listening session.
2. Listen empathetically to the child, without giving advice or trying to “fix” the situation.
3. What do you say? Less is more. You may wish to use statements like this:
 - a. “I can see you are hurt.”
 - b. “That must be very hard.”
 - c. “I’m so sorry...”
 - d. Non-verbals -- Nod, eye contact, lean in as you talk, pay attention to them
 - e. Paraphrase what they are saying - “Sounds like you are saying...”
 - f. Ask clarifying questions: “What do you mean when you say....”
 - g. Avoid saying, “It will be ok” or “I know just how you feel.”
4. Once the child has shared, pray and together blow out the candle (change the light) which reminds us that God is with us in the Light, but also goes with us everywhere we go, just as the smoke from the candle moves out from one place to every place.
5. Allow what you’ve learned to guide your prayer time together to close your Holy Listening time.

Resources:

All resources adapted from <https://www.leanne-hadley.com/holy-listening> as part of our “A Time for Children” experience.