

Listening in Focusing Partnership

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Preliminary Contexts about Listening

Listening and Focusing: Listening is intricately connected to focusing. Listening to yourself carefully is intrinsic to felt sensing. Learning to listen to yourself suggests how to listen to others. Listening well to others trains you in how to listen to yourself. Focusing and Listening have a mutually implying relationship.

Understanding the focusing domains/functions and phases helps you to refine your listening. With 3 domains and 5 phases, we have 15 different intersections of domains and phases (boxes on the form) with each implying things about listening. To differentiate your listening in those 15 ways is a very very advanced achievement. At this point in launching focusing as a practice, we only hope to help you differentiate listening to the 3 domains/functions of issue, felt sensing, and self-empathy, to get general tips on listening and to begin to think of listening as a life long project.

Listening in focusing partnership involves cultivating the habit of wanting to understand without judgment just what someone is saying in their own terms, with good will. Learning to have an open accepting space for whatever focuser, is a lifelong project. It never ends. How much you bring there, always will affect the rest. Starting with a basic good will and being able to sustain that through the specific content and way of the focuser are so important. You cannot just do that in a general way. “From the white light I can be with anyone” is nice but not what I’m advocating. We want to be engaged with the specifics and with the person of the focuser while freshly generating an openness to that particular person.

As a listener you need to know that that being with a person in their terms is already a great thing to be doing. Otherwise you’ll be looking for something more to do instead of putting your heart into just that.

Becoming a better listener in your life

While I am particularly interested in your developing the skill of listening in the context of focusing partnership, it is also true that this skill generalizes into helping yourself become a better listener generally. How that happens is not the same for each person.

If you reflect back exactly what someone is saying in regular conversation, it will probably feel odd to the other person. It might make them feel mimicked, a common North American response. On the other hand, if you are aware that a conversation IS NOT focusing, but you are curious about understanding better, there might be a moment where you recognize more meaning and depth and you might even say, “Hmm, those words seem important—‘a deeper equality’”. In the “those words seem important” you are explaining why you would want to do the odd thing of repeating words.

Learning to listen in focusing partnership develops an embodied understanding that beingness and being with, is already quite something. It should already feel good to you as a focuser when someone is being with you exactly as you are. “Wow they aren’t messing with me. Whew, what

a relief, what an open space.” Of course this beingness that you develop as a listener in focusing partnership can generalize to the listening you do in your life generally. But be open to how that happens, it may not look like the listening of focusing partnership at all.

Listening in partnership versus Listening in psychotherapy or in other professional contexts

Different professions have developed ways of listening which are part of those professions. Psychotherapists, especially, have studied listening and developed particular ways of doing that according to their orientation and style. Learning the listening in focusing partnership will eventually enhance that professional listening. Sometimes, the enhancement happens continuously from the beginning of focusing partnership. Other times, it is not smooth and can be bumpy. For some professionals, the style of listening in focusing partnership, interferes with their highly developed professional listening style. Sometimes, it is hard to do focusing listening without bringing their own professional style into it.

Generally, if you learn listening in partnership well, this conflict will resolve and there will be a fertile dance between your professional and partnership listening. Occasionally, achieving this productive dance between the two, can take a long time.

After you have mastered listening in focusing partnership in the ways outlined in this course, you are welcome to develop your own style of listening in partnership and that may be quite influenced by your professional style. Just make sure you master the style here first. It can easily take 100 focusing exchanges to really have a strong grasp of the model presented here.

Egalitarianism

Focusing and focusing partnership have a strong link to seeing the intrinsic equality in people, and focusing partnership differentiates itself from psychotherapy and “psychotherapy exchange” in its emphasis on the equality of the two people and the fundamental leadership the focuser has in the process. Even though there are a few forms of psychotherapy which also give the lead to the client, the form of listening in focusing partnership here is easily distinguished from 99% of the listening that happens in psychotherapy.

This is important. Focusing partnership is a unique relationship. It is neither psychotherapy nor friendship nor collegiality. Focusing partnership is a free way to find safe personal and professional growth. Focusing partnership is a training in how to function in a new worldview. We want it to be different from psychotherapy and friendship even though we acknowledge links to both.

Learning to Listen in Focusing Partnership

I always recommend four 1:1 sessions (on the phone or in person) for getting partnership established. General ways to get started are not as effective as very specific guidance at the beginning in 1:1 sessions. The first of the 4 sessions is mostly on focusing but the other three sessions have the listening training involved as well.

I have excellent trainers who have trained with me extensively and a couple of them charge as little as \$25/hr. A level 1 focusing workshop (usually 12 hours) is another way to get oriented to focusing partnership.

For my initial course launching the practice of focusing, I require the four 1:1 sessions plus a 3 person 3 hour (3p3h) applied focusing sessions with myself or a level 1 focusing workshop (or the equivalent). Though the 3p3h applied focusing session does not teach you listening, it is the best setting for really getting a sense of Domain Focusing quickly. Once you have that sense you are ready to learn the listening and focusing that this model makes possible.

Please note that some focusing coaches do 1:1 sessions but they are not doing partnership coaching. They don't put you in the role of both listener and focuser; they only put you in the role of focuser. Those sessions are great, too, but to be ready for a 10 month course in focusing partnership, you need the "partnership coaching" sessions which include some time in both roles.

The suggestions and guidelines below are particularly oriented to people who have already had some initial orientation to focusing partnership either through the 1:1 partnership coaching or a level 1 workshop. However, I am always happy to hear of someone who learned how without individual guidance.

1) The importance of practice for overcoming anxiety. In learning to listen in a focusing partnership, almost everyone goes through a time of tension about "am I doing it right?". "Am I remembering correctly?" "Am I going to remember?" Regular focusing- listening exchanges are essential for getting through this tension and anxiety. People who love listening or who are skilled in other contexts (as a therapist, as a consultant) may come with more confidence. But listening in a focusing partnership is not the same as those other contexts. Sometimes, the person who is highly skilled as a listener in another context, requires the most practice before they settle down into listening in focusing partnership. Practice, practice, practice—there is no way into launching focusing as a practice with its requisite strength in listening without regular practice.

The course is designed for weekly practice with a peer in focusing partnership. The weekly exchange requires about an hour. Getting the anxiety low enough that precise listening is available without over-efforting can be a long project. If you are especially vulnerable to anxiety anyway, it may be a more difficult project, but it will also have deeper meaning.

2) No guiding, no suggesting, no intervening initiated by the listener!

In my teaching model, I prohibit questions, suggestions, guiding in any way which is initiated by the listener during the 10 month course in Launching Focusing as a Practice. A listener can always guide if the focuser initiates and explicitly asks you for help or guidance.

Other focusing teachers vary on this issue. Some have the practice completely guided by the listener, others allow little suggestions like "maybe you want to stay with that". The particular style of listening you end up preferring as a focuser or even as a listener long term, is not my concern. I teach it this way because developing a deep appreciation for an active listening (saying back) which adds nothing, takes a lot of practice. In my robust experience of doing focusing exchange with focusers from all over the world, only people with an extended time of practicing it this way, have been able to listen in the style I ask for --no questions, no suggestions, no interventions initiated by the listener. I have concluded that this skill of listening where you are content to not intervene but actively looking to support exactly where the

focuser is, is one of the highest level listening skills. It requires a fairly long time to establish this as a skill you could turn on or off.

When focusers do not have a robust training this way, they typically think they can “turn on” the “absolute listening” when they want to. This is true for distinguished focusing teachers and very experienced partners. If someone has not had a phase of 20-30 practice sessions without adding things (interpretations, projections, suggestions, etc.), they are not able to effectively listen when I ask for the kind of listening which does neither adds nor suggests.

It is interesting that people without this training, are confident they can “turn it on” easily. As long as the focuser is not too deep, but more at a cognitive level, they are successful. The moment the focuser goes deeply into the felt sense, the listener then does what they generally do.

A big factor in the length of this course is that it typically takes 10-20 practice sessions to stop trying to guide/help as a listener and another 10-20 sessions to really discover in your body all the unlimited ways of listening, all the choices, still available within this not guiding, not suggesting method. 40 sessions practicing weekly is about 10 months. The course is a 10 month course mostly for this reason.

3) Quantity & Kinds of Partnership: The course is designed to give 50 focusing exchanges apart from those happening in workshops. 35-43 of those are in weekly partnerships with a peer. 10 of those are in 1:1 exchanges with a coach. 5 of those are within conference call “focusing in action” groups. 43 is the number of weeks in the course. 35 sessions in the peer partnerships out of the 43 possible weekly sessions still works, so there is room for misses. Even with as few as 30 exchanges with a peer, the system works IF you have gotten in at least 4 exchanges with each of your 5 partners. We assign partners at the five workshops (5) and you stay with each partner for 7-9 weeks.

The variation in partners is quite important for developing the skill. If you only work with one partner, you don’t tend to develop a “good enough” listening such that you could exchange with many people in the focusing world and have predictable positive outcomes.

In the ten 1:1 partnerships with a coach, the coach is especially trained in how to make process suggestions occasionally while still protecting the basic practice aspect. These sessions insure that you have experience in partnership with someone who is very skilled, otherwise you may not have a clear sense of how a more mature focusing partnership works.

Moreover, it is common that each person in a course finds that a few of the skills in focusing partnership, do not come easily. By having this experience with a coach we hope to help you identify which skills need special attention and we hope to give some of that special attention. The coach will help with both the focusing and the listening side of partnership.

4) Sustaining a great attitude when the focuser doesn’t seem to find the felt sense

Many listeners want to intervene and help when the focuser is not finding the felt sense. In this training, I prohibit that intervention unless the focuser initiates a request for help. Your job is to sustain an accepting attitude. Many a person has confided in me that they are so frustrated that their partner does not get into the felt sense. Typically, I ask them what kind of attitude they are

maintaining during that time. They assure me they are fine in their attitude. Of course, later I hear from their partner how they experienced the person above as being judgemental.

Nothing is as inviting for exploration of the felt sense than a deep sense of acceptance from your partner. Learning to have deep acceptance is a life long process. We are never done. Use your frustration at your partner's seeming inability to find the felt sense, to work on the quality of your acceptance.

One of the reasons I prohibit help, is that in this first 10 month course, people are so frequently mistaken about when there is and is not a felt sense, and, because the ways people have of helping are so unrefined that they aren't so helpful.

Of course many people are wanting to teach focusing. Then it is good to find a friend outside the course who knows nothing about focusing and try teaching there, of course explaining how little you know about teaching focusing.

In mastering focusing partnership, we want to establish great comfort without intervening.

5) Receiving Corrections well

When a focuser hears a reflection, they may say what has been left out that is important. In this case, the listener would then say that and understand this is how the process functions. For example:

The focuser may also ask for certain words or tell you what they want or ask you to say something in a certain way. You the listener, want to welcome this guidance from the focuser. After all, it is their process you are trying to serve and they are in charge.

Focuser: it feels like a rough, solid, dewey, mixture of mush

Listener: it feels like a solid mixture of mush

Focuser: A rough, solid, dewey, mixture of mush

Listener: A rough, solid, dewey, mixture of mush

Focuser: Could you say that again but in a slow dripping with emotion kind of way?

Listener: (says it again and as best they can in a slow, dripping with emotion, kind of way)

6) Goals of Course related to listening.

The first goal of this course is that **you can exchange focusing turns with any other focuser in the world and have confidence that most of the time, it will work for both persons.** Skilled empathic listening is a big part of reaching this goal.

The second goal is that you will have the practice of focusing partnership so well established that, **in the event of a prolonged absence from practicing, you could return to the practice and have the skill/method come back to you quickly.** Having the listening skill well established helps you recover the practice easily. Focusing partnership is ahead of its time, and it is not unusual for people to leave focusing for a while and then return. We want each of you to have this practice available as the world catches up and the robust value of focusing partnership becomes even clearer.

The third goal is that **you have a robust appreciation of listening and its infinite variety even within the not adding, not suggesting orientation.**

7) **Natural versus Robotic Listening.** I am dedicated to a natural empathic listening. A big threat to that is “robotic” listening. I discourage memorization and repeating back mechanically from the beginning of the course. It is ok to forget and lose things as a listener. Nonetheless, people with excellent memories tend to use memorization and repeating back despite these efforts of mine. And on the focuser’s side, people will get upset when you miss the precision of something which needs to be precise. Nonetheless, memory of a session needs to come out of your interest in the other person’s focusing not out of mechanical memorizing. When you lower anxiety sufficiently, you will find that the design and content of a session will come back to you as much as you need it to, without much effort. Sure you might mark key words and phrases which seem to hold “more”, in your memory. But what is important to reflect back, changes as the focusing unfolds. As a listener I might mark one phrase inside me, but then, with a turn by the focuser, that marking becomes less important, and later, again more important but in a different way. Ultimately, when you begin reflecting you want to be “in” the experience and have what you need come back as you need it.

8) **Clarifying you and other.** Depending on how you are set up and on your life experience, you may confuse your own associations and projections with the focuser’s material . . . MORE or LESS. The practice of focusing is a great method for improving your boundaries and clarifying what is you and what is other. Your focusing partner will come to expect a high level of clarity there. Nonetheless, it is more important that you are moving in the direction of clearer boundaries than that you have clear boundaries. If you have limitations with this kind of clarity, it may help to work on acceptance of your limitations. If a listener tells me at the beginning of an exchange that they sometimes confuse their own ideas with what the other has said and they are working to improve, it brings a lot of tolerance from within me. But a listener who has not accepted/recognized their difficulties in this area, may bring frustration for the focuser.

Special Issues in Learning to Listen

Timing of reflection

When the focuser pauses, are they pausing for a reflection or are they pausing for going deeper. The first implies a reflection, the second usually implies not reflecting. Good listeners wonder about which is going on and realize they will not always know. Good listeners do not always reflect in a pause, nor do they always wait in silence. They are aware of the choice. A third possibility if you think it is a “going deeper” pause, is to stay silent for 3 or 4 seconds and then say just a bit of the piece back where the person seems to be going deeper. For example if the person says, “I wonder about this situation with my romantic interest . . . what is the right direction?” (silence) and they seem to be going deeper, you might wait 5 seconds (yep, they are still silent) and then just say “right direction” (their last phrase) and nothing else. Because they seem to be going deeper, you might want to say this little something to accompany them after the longer pause but you would want it to be short, so as not to interrupt the going deeper but to sustain it. Tone of voice is important here, when it is right, it kind of smoothly fits in the pause.

Another timing issue is how much to reflect and how little. You need to have skill in both of these in order to be able to choose comfortably between these options. So I recommend that, periodically, you decide to do a minimalist (1-3 words maximum) reflection in a turn and checking with your focuser beforehand if that is ok to try. Most listeners in an early course tend

to reflect too much. However, there are also those on the other extreme. They then need to practice doing fuller reflections. But again, arrange this fuller reflecting with your partner before the partnership starts as the other person may also want to be practicing a particular way of listening.

Especially in the early months of a 10 month study of focusing partnership, be generous with your listener as you would want them to be generous with you.

Sometimes, fuller reflections are difficult for the focuser because they are losing time to do their focusing work while you reflect so fully. I recommend staying sensitive to this issue and adapting if necessary at certain times in the session and not reflecting so fully if the focuser seems frustrated.

Example:

Focuser: I'm working on a health issue. It had been around for some time but without diagnosis. It's related to another longstanding health issue which ironically was in the best place it has been in a few years right before I got the diagnosis. The doctor actually delivered the diagnosis in a good way kind of implying, " we don't really understand this problem so take the diagnosis with a 'grain of salt' ." Given that the bigger health issue was in such a good place, and given that this diagnosis is quite variable in its prognosis and given that it seems to be a mild version, I was doing quite well. . . . "doing well" considering that the diagnosis was also the one I had dreaded and I was surprised when it actually came. I have good luck with health and doctors. . . . this receiving the dreaded diagnosis was different. I worked a bit after the session with my focusing partner and was fine. Then I started doing research on the internet and slowly started getting sad and upset and kind of. . . . splattered. . . . or scatteredor disintegrated. Yeah, I can feel that now. Becoming aware of the worst possibilities, wow, that was and is heavy heavy heavy.

Listener (Minimalist): splattered. . . disintegrated. . . heavy, heavy, heavy

Listener (Full): Let me see if I have this right. There's a longstanding health issue that's been around for a while. Recently something associated or in the general category of that longstanding health issue has come up. Yesterday, you got a diagnosis. It was the one you dreaded. And that is rare for the "dreaded" to happen to you in medicine. Ironically the diagnosis came when the longstanding general health issue was in one of its better places. And the doctor delivered the diagnosis well noting that medicine really doesn't understand this one so take it with a "grain of salt". And focusing with your partner, things were fine. But then when you went on the internet, things slowly got heavy, especially with the worst case scenarios. You ended up feeling splattered . . . scattered . . . disintegrated and you can feel that now. The worst case scenarios were and are heavy, heavy, heavy.

Memory. A good listener is not recording nor memorizing what a focuser is saying. The remembering is natural and fluid coming out of the interest and regard for the focuser. A good listener is noticing what seems more important but also allowing "what is important" to keep evolving as the focuser continues. That is the fluidity which is needed. Below in brackets, I will show what the listener might be seeing as important during the segment.

*Put an example in here *****

So general comments about listening involving timing/memory/short-long option is most important to develop in focusing partnership.

Also note that some contents may be quite intricate and hard to understand. The focuser may be talking in a shorthand. As a listener, you certainly don't want to fake understanding when you have no idea what they are talking about, it is also true that asking for clarification could be a distraction to the focuser. Some focusers prefer that you understand as best you can without asking for much clarification. This turns out to be a skill to be developed. It is a skill to have partial understanding and to remain comfortable with the partiality.

For other people, they enjoy your indicating your confusion and asking for clarification. It is good to learn both. In this session, the interrupting for clarification due to odd phrasings would have been so frequent that it probably would have been distracting and not productive.

When it is important to clarify content, it is often wise to do the smallest possible amount of clarifying. The focuser may not want you to understand everything or it may be a distraction to spend the whole time clarifying. For example, if a focuser uses the word "relevating" and the listener is not familiar with some of Gendlin's writings, they may not know that word. It actually is a term Gendlin creates from the word "relevant". It means to be finding relevant events in your past in relation to a current situation or felt sense. A listener with no clue to the meaning of "relevating" who was beyond their comfort limits might just say in a small opening "and is it important that I understand 'relevating'". Such a response communicates that you don't want to interrupt and you make it easy for the focuser to say "no" and continue. And you also are honest and not faking an understanding. The focuser can choose to explain or not.

You take your cue from the focuser. If the focuser seems happy to explicate their meaning with your small question "and is it important that I understand 'relevating'?", then you might ask another such clarifying question later in the session after the rhythm of not interrupting has been reestablished. If the focuser says, "no, just let me get to the place where I need to go in", then you would probably avoid subsequent clarifying questions.

Note that clarifying questions are an exception to the "no questions" rule. Some listeners who have a hard time with the "no questions" rule, really get into being artists with clarifying questions. This style may be fine to develop later, but, for now, don't overuse the clarifying question. Give equal time to being comfortable with a partial understanding.

Listening to Domains

Issue Domain

If the focuser is working in the issue domain, as a listener you would try to join with this thinking function in focusing. You want to get into their head, into their cognitive style, into their way of laying out the issue. Whether their way is ordered and methodical or bizarre and messy or rambling, or characterized by quick leaps between not so obviously connected things, you want to join them. Sometimes, when someone is first laying out an issue, I like to do an ample reflection, reflecting everything back as a way for me to get into their issue and into their style of thinking. After that, my reflections are shorter.

Of course, be gentle with yourself, you will not be able to easily join someone's style if it is antithetical to yours. It is the intention to join their style as much as is possible which is important, not the perfection in joining another style.

In the issue domain, there is a critical function of preparing the ground for entering felt sensing, so **where** the person decides to work and how they define that, can be a big deal. The "name of the issue" then gets very precise and full reflection, especially when it seems to be preparing for an entry into felt sensing.

Steps in the development of the issue are important. Rather than reflecting details, the listener would recognize different "sections" of a segment and just reflect one or two words for each "section" hoping those words will hold that section for the focuser. .

Key words, unusual phrasing, things that seem to hold a lot "more" are important to reflect. Paraphrasing and summarizing are usually discouraged in the listening in a focusing partnership; however, in a story or an elaborate layout in the issue domain, some paraphrasing and summing may show that you comprehend the segment and that you are saving space for the focuser by summarizing or paraphrasing. It may also show that you misunderstood. If you are aware of this misunderstanding possibility and are hoping to be corrected when necessary, your listener is less likely to be disturbed by misunderstanding. The listener then easily corrects if it is important.

Note that some reordering can be ok when reflecting in the Issue Domain. It doesn't have to be in the same order as presented. It doesn't have to be with the last thing reflected first. You are trying to show that you received and grasped the listener basic architecture, the relationships of themes, presented by the focuser.

Listening to Felt Sensing

When the focuser is working in a felt sensing domain, they are predominantly symbolizing, describing, representing, expressing, entering the felt sense. It is important to know that symbolizing, describing, representing and expressing also MISS what we do with felt sense and focusing. I use those words (symbolizing, describing) to give people a clue but they aren't exactly right.

In listening to the felt sense work of a focuser, I am letting some version of their felt sense form in me. It is kind of the tip of the volcano or the extracted resonance because I cannot feel the whole intricacy of how that resonates with the focuser's life. But sensing the vibration or the felt whole helps me to understand. I am aware that the words and gestures and descriptions the focuser uses in this domain are pointers to a "more". "Tight" as a felt sense entry has much more meaning than "tight" describing muscle tension. "Tight" simply on a sensation level or "tight" as a description of anxiety, may not be a felt sense entry but it may be on the way to felt sense entry.

If someone says, "I am feeling bad.", we might think they are down. But then they say what kind of bad and they say, "it's a getting ready to party, I am a BAD DUDE, vibrant, intense, free kind of bad". Gendlin's work is influenced by Wittgenstein, the philosopher, who argued that words always have subtly or greatly different meanings based on context. In one way, without knowing the felt sense, it is like we only know ½ or 1/3 of someone's meaning, if that.

In the felt sensing domain, paraphrasing would be a disaster. It would be like paraphrasing a poem. In a poem, it is clear that rhythm, sound, particular word, and word order make a difference. So it is with felt sensing. “stomach ache” is not the same as “pain in stomach” when you are describing a felt sense. If you are using the words in setting up the issue (you are working in the Issue Domain), and it is not part of “naming the issue” “pain in stomach” might substitute well for “stomach ache”. (When the focuser is going through an elaborate process for naming the issue quite precisely, then you the listener would want to be quite precise reflecting back that name.)

In reflecting back felt sense descriptors precisely, it is important as a listener to know the key signs of felt sensing. Is there a slowing down, is there a pausing? Is the stutter rhythm present? For example, a stutter rhythm might be “well, it’s kind of . . . a . . . like well, . . .hmm, . . .like . . . strong in its own way”. Is the word usage unusual? For example, “oh it’s kind of a dark thick scary.” “Dark, thick, scary” is unusual word usage. Does the person take the time to check back with their felt sense when you reflect? All these are indicators of felt sensing though never automatically do they indicate felt sensing.

In reflecting a felt sense, you are trying to let a felt sense form inside you the listener which is OF the felt sense of the focuser. Of course you could be really wrong. Of course you can’t have the meaning they have, but you can sort of resonate with their felt sense. When you reflect back, you are trying to do that from the having of the felt sense of their felt sense. Also, the reflecting back is an effort to help the parallel felt sense form in you the listener. I often reflect back much more slowly than the person spoke the words because I want to give the felt sense in me a chance to form and I want to give the focuser time to check back with the felt sense. The slow reflecting serves a double purpose.

Listening to Self-Empathy

The cue that the focuser is in the domain of self-empathy is often a question the focuser is asking explicitly: Can I be kind to myself in this situation; can I be friendly to what has come? Is it ok to be exploring this issue? Is there a way to explore this issue without it being too ____ (e.g. scary)? Another cue is when self-empathy is more subtle. The focuser is just considering their self in the process and being careful in the approach.

When you the listener recognize that the focuser is in the self-empathy domain, you parallel what they are checking for in an intrapersonal way, in your interpersonal attitude toward the focuser. If they say “can I be kind to myself in this situation?” you the listener, are asking **silently** to yourself “can I be kind to this person working on this situation”.

Sometimes you are having a hard time listening to the focuser or perhaps you are tired or perhaps the focuser’s content makes it hard to listen. Then, perhaps in your mind, during a silence, you might try being gentle with yourself in the situation of trying to listen. Just a moment for that would be part of listening from self-empathy.

Using 3 Chairs representing the Domains to develop your listening

Many people try to integrate an understanding of the domains by understanding them cognitively, but it really needs to be a whole body understanding.

The best way to get that understanding is to move between 3 chairs as you listen. I recommend that the chair on your right as a listener (on the focuser's left) is the Issue Domain. The middle chair is the felt sensing domain. The chair on your left as a listener is the self-empathy domain.

As you follow the process of the focuser, also be following which domain they are in. When they are mostly functioning in one domain, move to that chair. Reflect from that chair. Of course you wouldn't want to be hopping back and forth between chairs every 5 seconds so just when there is a clear change to another domain, then move to that chair.

This movement tends to really help you get it in your body that listening to the felt sense (in the middle chair) is really different bodily, than listening to the thinking in the Issue domain. And listening to self-empathy work has yet another whole feel to it. Self-empathy is the "help" in focusing.

This movement between chairs needs lots of practice. You need to learn to recognize changes in function (in domain) easily and fluidly. This chair method teaches you to do this recognition eventually automatically. Having this "recognition of function" going along with the regular active listening to each segment and to the whole, gives a whole fullness to your listening. It gives it body. It makes for embodied listening.

Listening to Phases

I use 5 phases for focusing. They parallel Gendlin's 6 steps and a 7th step he has considered adding. The 5 phases of Domain Focusing also adds things which are not elaborated in the 6 steps of Gendlin.

Each phase has certain things happening that imply different kinds of listening.

Listening to Getting Started—Phase 1

There are many ways to get started. Of course you need to know "Clearing a Space" and its many variations so that you can recognize your focuser doing that. In my 11 year partnership, we each often do some kind of variation on clearing a space. There isn't much reflection, maybe a word or a phrase just to show that I am with you. But it is very important that the other person is there.

Another way that people start, is that they just dive into a story or situation. If you recognize that diving in, you might want to give an ample or a minimalist reflection as in the example earlier. Another way to start is to scan your body physically. Another way would be to start from a felt sense. As a listener you want to recognize the "Getting Started" phase, and make ample space for the beginning perhaps waiting to reflect a bit or perhaps going early for an opening to reflect. As a listener, you respect the importance of the focuser choosing in which domain to start. After the focuser choosing the domain, you the listener respect the importance of the focuser choosing how to start within that domain.

If the person starts from Self-Empathy: "Is there a good way to be with myself now?" You will understand what they are doing and that that kind of beginning may be a bit meditative. As a listener you might want to wonder "what's a good way to be with myself in beginning to listen?"

Listening to Domain Linking—Phase 2

In listening to Domain Linking, you are aware that focusing kind of becomes focusing when two domains start functioning and linking. You notice when someone is holding an issue and waiting for the felt sense to form that the issue domain and felt sensing domain are linking. You might move into the felt sense chair from the issue chair. You might reflect the last name of the issue along with the first felt sense word. Your listening is in support of the linking, in support of the two or even three domains present.

Focuser: I'm remembering the importance of this sort of meditative nuance I stumbled into yesterday. I was doing a progressive melting from one "octave" to another in relation to a 5 hour segment of a day. As it melted or transformed I was aware of something like dots, lines, and planes which were not easy to make a whole out of. But if I kind of held those point-locations, lines, planes until a whole feel came, then the next melting had come and quite clearly.

As I am remembering, I'm also sensing it inside, especially a way of holding, and a letting the lines and places and planes just be there. Something was very locating or location awareness friendly

I'm feeling thankful that I remembered to acknowledge this and to talk about it, it's kind of an appreciation, an in-process appreciating.

Listener: You're remembering this sort of meditative nuance of melting and you are sensing a special kind of holding and location-friendly sense and there's an in-process appreciating that you are acknowledging and talking about this. Is it important that I understand "melting" well?

Comment: The listener reflects the issue briefly (You are remembering this sort of meditative nuance of melting), they link to the felt sense (you are sensing a special kind of holding and location-friendly sense) again briefly and finally they link to the self-empathy function (and there's an in-process appreciating that you are acknowledging and talking about this). Because the listener is aware of the domain linking phase, the listener holds the links together. They check on the importance of understanding "melting" well. (see discussion on clarifying, earlier)

Listening to Entering and Exploring—Phase 3

The listener recognizes the entry aspect of focusing and is very supportive and patient. They understand the slowing which typically comes in entering. In felt sensing, they know it can take quite a while for a shift to come and focusing is all about entering to get to the shift. They simply keep great company. They know they want to reflect back the word or phrase which is describing the felt sense best from the focuser's perspective. They want to say that word back with an approximate sense in their own body so that the focuser can check it and go even deeper into it.

A good listener recognizes the different avenues into felt sensing and goes with them fluidly. A good listener understands how a focuser can spend lots of time in the self-empathy domain as a way of entering and exploring. A good listener understands an elaborate story telling, an elaborate naming of the issue, as ways of entering through the Issue Domain.

If you know that some focusers do a "back and forth" entering, a little felt sensing and then further elaboration on the issue then more felt sensing, etc. you will be with them in your

listening as they go back and forth between Issue and Felt Sense. Besides listening to a particular segment you are recognizing the architecture of a session as it is happening.

Listening to Shifting—Phase 4

When a focuser starts using specific questions for stimulating a shift, a listener knows to say those questions back exactly and slowly and understands you are inviting a shift. A listener knows how to be very still after reflecting one of those questions back.

When a shift comes, a good listener is very patient and slow recognizing that the shift often needs time to settle in and reveal itself. When insight comes after a shift, a listener knows how important THIS INSIGHT is. This is the insight we are looking for. This is the insight which comes after the shift. Of course that will be reflected back, and with special care. With a little more time after the insight, the new possibilities in the situation start to fall out (to emerge), the listener recognizes this moment where the purpose of focusing is being realized. Of course the listener will reflect back these new possibilities and reflect them back with the natural support and excitement coming from that recognition.

Listening to Acting Into the Situation—Phase 5

After the shift and the insight and the new possibilities, there may be a phase of working within those new possibilities. “Ok, within the new possibilities, what do I specifically want to do and when?” This very specific checking can take quite a while to get it right. The listener knows this and is ever so patient in this phase. The listener understands that one little tiny distinction or decision can make all the difference in the world when you are really going to take a specific action.

Listening in Domain Focusing

In Domain Focusing we attend to the segments and to the whole process of the focuser like in any other focusing model. In addition we carry recognition and understanding of the different domains (functions) and of the different phases. Each domain and each phase carry a different kind of listening, a different set of recognitions, a different set of possibilities. This deeper intricacy brings a rich fullness to listening.

Example of listening with comments and some notations about domain and phase

Exercises for Advanced Listening

A. What is the key word to reflect?

In a partnership, the listener is restricted to one or two words maximum reflection. No connector phrases (‘you are feeling’, ‘you are thinking’, ‘you are asking’, ‘you are wondering’). The focuser gives a hand signal (or sound signal if telephone) when they are ready for a reflection and they give a robust pause—5-10 seconds to indicate readiness for reflection. The listener is limited to 1 or 2 word reflections. Focuser should pause for reflection at least 4 times in a 12-18 minute turn.

B. What is the key phrase to reflect? Same as above but this time the listener can reflect a phrase or a series of words, up to even 8 or 10 words but more often 3-5 words. The listener does not use “connecting phrases” (“you are sensing, you are feeling, you are noting, you are expressing, etc.”). In another session you can experiment with connector phrases and become comfortable using them and not using them.

- C. A very advanced focusing teacher gives a fairly robust and complex segment of their own focusing session. 5-8 people then prepare a reflection and make notes on that. Each person then reflects. The teacher listens carefully to each reflection and then makes notes on how it worked and did not work. At the end, the teacher shares from those notes with each person. This exercise turns out to be quite profound for the teacher as well. Getting many different reflections to the same segment is a very powerful event. It shows the wide rich variation in listening.
- D. Reflecting work in the Issue Domain. The focuser intentionally stays in the issue domain and lays out the complexity of one of their issues or situations. The listener tries to enter the cognitive style, the way of thinking of the focuser. If you as the listener don't understand something, you might ask for a clarification or you might decide that it is better not to intrude. The listener reflects the segment in the style of the focuser and with as much detail as they can without becoming a tape recorder. The listener may also experiment with summarizing and paraphrasing at certain points.
- E. Reflecting work in the Felt Sensing Domain. The listener recognizes the entry into the FS domain. They know the "more" of the FS, that it is much more than the words. They pause before reflecting. They reflect slowly so the words help a FS form in them while the saying back is happening. They are as oriented toward the whole felt meaning as they are toward remembering the words. Their goal is to resonate with the focuser when reflecting the felt sense.
- F. Reflecting work with Self-Empathy. In reflecting the focuser's exploration of self-empathy, the listener is trying to have the empathy for the focuser which the focuser is trying to have for him or her self. If the focuser says, "Can I be gentle with myself in that situation with my boss and my friend?" The listener is trying to feel gentle toward the focuser as they say it back.
- G. Guessing the other domain. The teacher gives a segment in the issue domain and then silently writes down a description of their FS. The students reflect as in C but in addition they give a description of their felt sense of the teacher's felt sense, their guess. At the end, the teacher shares their felt sense. The students reflect trying to sense the FS as they reflect. This teaches the student about the hazards and benefits of guessing a felt sense, and shows them how much more is understood by having the felt sense described explicitly. Then the teacher does an issue segment, followed by a segment describing the FS of the issue, and then looks for the just right self empathy but does that silently and writes it down. Again the listener guesses the "just right" self empathy and the teacher shares what they wrote down. Again the listener should end up appreciate having the "just right" self-empathy explored explicitly by the focuser. The listener will see the limits of guessing. The whole exercise highlights the 3 domains as a whole worth filling out. It shows how much we are lacking when the functions are not filled out.
- H. Domain Linking. The focuser holds an Issue and waits for the felt sense to form. The listener says the holding question back. When the felt sense forms and has a handle, the listener reflects the issue (briefly) and the felt sense together. Practice all the other 5 Domain Linkings (I→SE; FS→I; FS→SE; SE→I; SE→FS—see Domain Focusing Form) saying the linking question back exactly and then when the new domain does come saying both the thing being held and then the thing that came.
- I. The Shifting Phase Listening. As the listener, you need to slow down as a shift starts to come. Often it is not obvious that shifting has started. It only becomes clear after a few minutes or more. Often you need to have a guarding, protective attitude when a shift is

emerging. You cannot be directive but you can keep reflecting the shift back if someone starts to criticize themselves. In effect you are protecting the shift that way but be tentative.

Recognizing the insight that comes after a shift leads to a special appreciation in your listening which is tangible to the focuser. Noticing the NEW POSSIBILITIES which then emerge and appreciating them, saying them back slowly also helps. Sometimes you can even tentatively use the word “insight” or “new possibilities” to show that you are seeing that. Of course you need to be willing to be mistaken and be corrected.

- J. **Following an Unexpected Turn.** When the listener goes in an unexpected direction can you fluidly follow like following a dancer who makes an unexpected move but sustain the listening.

Focuser: I’m trying to find something to focus on, but the only thing which keeps coming up and I keep pushing away, is how much I like you.

Listener: You’re trying to find something to focus on but only one thing keeps coming up even though you push it away and that is how much you like me.

- K. **Staying with Difficult Issues** (for you the Listener) When a focuser gets an atypical or threatening insight, can you be with that person without inserting your value.

Focuser: Maybe “marriage” as an institution is just off. Maybe Laing (R.D. Laing) was right and “family” is THE problem. Maybe I just need to get out of my marriage any way I can and as quickly as I can and don’t look back. . . . whew that’s kind of liberating to say that out loud. . . .expansive

Listener: (was left by his wife suddenly and was desperately wounded and feels threatened by this exploration): Maybe “marriage” as an institution is just off. Maybe you just need to get out quickly and don’t look back . . . a liberating . . . expansive feeling comes.

- L. **Not going too far for you.** Can you avoid going too far for you in listening to something that is not tolerable, that is not ok for you to give empathy to.

For example, let me tell a story from starting a Changes Group (a group for trading focusing partnership sessions) at Cambridge Friends Meeting (Quakers) in the early 90’s. About a year or two before starting the group, a pedophile had been “discovered” as he was trying to get into the Sunday School program. The meeting prohibited him from coming to events where there were children. He maintained that pedophilia was a good thing. Many of the quakers listened to his viewpoints. So one of my students asked me, “What if I were listening to Ronnie (the pedophile), and he started talking about the glory of sex with children, I know I couldn’t listen to that. My sister was abused by a pedophile.” I answered, that in that situation, you would quickly say, “I cannot listen to you on this issue. I have to stop this issue.”

I.E. there are certain things we can stretch to follow. Other things we really cannot stretch to nor should we. I chose examples in K. and L. which are easy to understand but the actual times when you can stretch and when you cannot stretch are not so simple. Sometimes something is really far out and weird but in fact you can listen to it empathically. Other times, something is quite benign and mundane but you know you cannot listen to it, empathically.

With couples learning to do focusing partnership with each other, there are many places where the question comes up, of “can I listen empathically to this theme”. I have a

“focusing implied” method of couples’ therapy, and it works a lot with this dilemma. I also make certain adaptations to focusing partnership for couples and other partners whose lives are intensely intertwined.

M. Reflecting earlier pieces from within a session to support self-empathy, felt sensing, or strong thinking

While I prohibit blatant adding or intervening, I do not prohibit reflecting an earlier phrase for a purpose. So if someone named the issue succinctly and has been exploring felt sensing for 10 minutes since then, you can reflect the current felt sense descriptor and then add, “and earlier you named the issue as _____”.

Or if the person is having difficulty ever touching a felt sense, and when they do, they quickly go back to telling a story, you could reflect a short phrase from the story and add, “and earlier you were describing the felt sense as _____”.

Or if the focuser worked on self-empathy about a situation that can be very overwhelming, and they found they could be careful with themselves (careful as a kind of self-empathy) and you see them possibly starting to get overwhelmed, you can reflect the current thing they are saying briefly and add, “and earlier you were working on being careful with this issue because it is easy to get overwhelmed by it”.

The key in all of these is the attitude with which you reflect the earlier piece. If you are tentative and saying it to see if it is helpful, things work well. If you are certain you are right and invested in being right, things tend to work poorly. If you try this “earlier reflection” and the person indicates they don’t want that, and you start doing the “earlier reflection” more frequently, that would could create problems. You want to always be acknowledging the authority of the focuser in leading their own process.

**Three Interactive Methods between
Focuser and Listener which strengthen Listening**

The Art of Rethreading:

Make an agreement with your partner that you will each practice rethreading at the end of your sessions. Allow 2-5 minutes for this practice.

The listener knowing the time allotted for the turn and seeing a good stopping place can say, “Would you like a rethreading?” If the focuser answers or nods affirmatively, then you can begin.

Being able to do a rethreading starts long before that, however. During the session, the listener does not memorize but may note inside, key words, in Domain segments, so that they could return to that place—for a small reflection from earlier (because of relevance to current edge) and/or for rethreading and/or for understanding the whole.

The listener when rethreading will go back to a marked or phrase at the beginning. Often it is the word which was reflected. Reflecting IS a kind of marking. Then the sequence kind of appears naturally after that.

The next important link comes to mind for the listener as the listener pauses in the rethread process. To maintain an implicit “trail trace” of what was important requires a ground of calmness and openness and a space for taking in. Anxiety and criticalness within the listener tend to erase the implicit whole of the session for the listener, then the “trail trace” is not there and this method does not work

The listener does not have to “get” every key word and segment. They just need to get many of them for the rethreading to work.

Sometimes the focuser will fill in a missing piece for you. As you are going through and you inevitably miss a few things or sense something but can't find it, the rethreading can become cooperative. The focuser can fill in those missing pieces.

Of course, the idea is for the focuser to hear back the whole sequence of the session. It often brings a sense of wonder to the focuser, like “Wow, I didn't realize how intricate the whole session was.”

The rethreading also tends to make both the focuser and the listener more aware of the experiential logic of focusing. There is a logic to experiencing. It is a different logic from the cognitive one we know. In a rethreading, we get a glimpse of that logic which is harder to see shorter reflections.

One option in rethreading is for the listener to move between the 3 chairs as you are listening in the session and then as you are rethreading to move between the domain segments by changing chairs as well. Sometimes you remember a change sequence in the chairs and then by moving to the self-empathy chair, for instance, that brings back the content of the self-empathy work earlier in the session.

The Triplet for Shift Question:

The 3 sequences below overlap in time.

1. The focuser initiates the shift question at a point where they have been entering felt sensing. Preferably, they have identified location and quality and have specified further (see Entering Phase in Felt Sensing Domain on the Domain Focusing Form) and used an additional avenue so that at least 4 avenues into Felt Sensing plus specifying further (FS#19) are present. The focuser uses a pre-arranged signal for this initiation (hand in air or tone on phone or sound) and the focuser suggests which FS #-- 20-25 to use. Focuser could also select SE (Self Empathy) question #15 or 16. The focuser then prepares for receiving the shift question from the listener. 5-10 seconds.
2. After the focuser gives the signal initiating the shift question . (e.g. raising their hand) and the # of the question (or sometimes they say the question), the listener prepares the question, remembering to use the FS words in the blank. If the focuser says the question, they say it the same way back but slower? If the focuser just asks for #20, the listener might use 2 or 3 of those words. What does that “hog sailing circa 1975camp” need (#20)? Or they might shorten it a little—What makes it so “hog sailing campy” (#21) ? Or. . . . What is the crux of the “hog sailing 75” (#22)? The listener is usually using the most recent FS descriptor and the one which resonates the most with the focuser but they are very open to being corrected on which words to use. The listener encourages a felt sense in themselves paralleling the focuser's felt sense? When the focuser gives the prearranged signal that they are ready (lowering hand, another tone, a

different sound) the listener delivers the shift question slowly and with an appreciation for the moment. Saying the words slowly is for the focuser having time to be resonating these reflected words with their felt sense and to notice if something moves. The listener is prepared to wait a good while for the focuser's response.

3. The Focuser gives full attention to the reflection of the listener but in a special way. The Focuser's attention is on both the listener's shift question AND on their own felt sense. The focuser is particularly ready to notice any fluctuations in the felt sense coming from the question or from a particular word. The Focuser may specify the FS phrasing ("hog sailing 1975" instead of "hog sailing campy" and have the question repeated again using signals to get timing right.

The Focuser is open to cognitive responses within but quickly checks to see if the FS moved. The Focuser may ask for another question. It often takes two or three of the shift questions before one really gets the FS to shift. Sometimes the FS seems to shift a tiny bit, and if you hang around respectfully for a few minutes, that tiny shift becomes a more substantive shift.

Once a shift comes, it needs to be protected, and nurtured for 3-5 minutes for it to really have its effect. Focusers be wary of negative stuff here—it is good to say something like "can't this wait until later" to negativity. Listeners may check, "is this a place that needs to be protected from negativity or criticism, for a few minutes?" The listener needs to really be asking not "telling through asking".

When an interesting cognitive response comes to a shift question but the FS does not move, I recommend noting the interesting response, but then setting it aside and trying another shift question.

When a shift happens and is protected, it is typically followed by insight and then a bit later, by new possibilities in the situation. The focuser often does not notice this process, they are often entranced and just saying what comes. It is helpful for the listener to recognize the insight coming after a shift and to reflect it back since it is so important, and even more so, to recognize the new possibilities when they emerge. For example:

Focuser: yeah, something feels lighter now, almost promising [FS has shifted] [after a while] now I see I need to differentiate my 2nd divorce from my first

Listener: You're getting **this insight** about the need to differentiate your 2nd divorce from your first

Focuser: Yeah, it's like then I can go different ways and in different sequences. . . I'm not locked into one position.

Listener: Now you see you can go different ways and in different sequences,you're NOT locked into one position.....these are **NEW POSSIBILITIES**

Of course some focusers might not want that adding coming in and, if so, you wouldn't insert it, but others do like it.

The Triplet for Bonded Partnership

This exercise is dedicated to partnerships being successful even if the partners do not have great natural rapport. I think that the magic of focusing happens when a focuser really uses the reflection of the listener for entering further into the felt sense.

The triplet begins when the focuser is clearly mostly exploring felt sensing and the focuser raises their left hand to signal the beginning of the sequence. If you are working on the phone you can use a sound signal by hitting a number or a verbal cue (“I’m raising my hand”) or a pre-arranged sound (doooooooooo) for the initial cue. You also need to pre-arrange a second signal such as lowering the hand, or 2 beeps on the phone, or “I’m lowering my hand” or a sound (waaaaaaaaa).

It is helpful if the focuser has identified the location of the felt sense in addition to some of the quality of it before they ask for the special reflection.

The 3 sequences below overlap in time some.

1. The focuser initiates the triplet at a point where they have been entering felt sensing. Preferably, they have identified location and quality so that at least 2 avenues into Felt Sensing are present. The focuser uses a pre-arranged signal for this initiation (hand in air or tone on phone or sound). The focuser then prepares for receiving the special reflection of the listener. 5-10 seconds.
2. After the focuser gives the signal initiating the triplet. (e.g. raising their hand), the listener prepares the reflection only, remembering to just use the FS words which seem to be resonating most closely and not to reflect too many words. They encourage a felt sense in themselves paralleling the focuser’s felt sense and establish that base. When the focuser gives the prearranged signal that they are ready (lowering hand, another tone, a different sound) the listener delivers the prepared reflection like a gracious host serving their dinner guests. They say the words slowly. They say the words from the feeling tone they have picked up from the focuser if they have that or inviting that to form as they say them. Saying the words slowly is for the focuser having time to be resonating these reflected words with their felt sense. The listener is conscious of giving this special opportunity to the focuser—of resonating with their own description but in the ever-so-respectful voice. Saying the words slowly also invites the parallel felt sense to form in the listener OR it helps an already formed parallel felt sense, to deepen in the listener.
3. The Focuser gives full attention to the reflection of the listener but in a special way. The Focuser’s attention is on both the listener’s reflection AND on their own felt sense. The focuser is particularly ready to notice any fluctuations in the felt sense corresponding to a particular word. The Focuser may ask for that word or the whole phrase to be reflected again, each time noticing the further response from their own felt sense.

Doing this exercise establishes a bond between focuser and listener. This exercise tends to generalize this kind of listening to other places within a session, even without the signals. It also tends to generalize this kind of interactive process to focusing partnership generally, but not all the time. As a focuser in a partnership, I would not always want this kind of reflection for every reflection. Sometimes, I want a more distant reflection which just lets me know the listener is with me. But usually, in a session, I want some place in my session to have this intense listening to my listener’s reflection.