Session 46: Listening Like a Leader: The Peer Support Conversation

Duration: 60 minutes • Recovery education group. Ensure all participants are seated and ready

Materials: Whiteboard; workbooks and pens; the Session 46 handout (Listening Like a Leader)

Learning objectives — by the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Use the three peer listening moves: open question, reflection, summary
- Recognize and refuse the righting reflex (Session 39) in a helping conversation
- Run a ten-minute peer conversation that ends with the other person's own next step

Opening (3 minutes)

Newcomer bridge (60 seconds): This is Phase 5 — Giving Back. The one idea today is that a peer's most powerful tool is a question asked well and an answer actually heard. You are welcome here without earlier sessions; everything you need for today is in this session. The most powerful tool a peer owns is not advice. It is a question asked well and an answer actually heard. Today we practice the conversation that steadies people: listen, reflect, and hand the decision back to its owner.

Check-in prompt (8 minutes)

Name, craving 0–10, one word for your week — then: "Think of the last time you felt truly heard — not fixed, heard. What did the listener actually do?" Log every craving score on the roster.

Passing is honored — you may pass any question, prompt, or practice without explanation, step out and rejoin, and choose a partner-only option where one is offered.

Teaching (20 minutes)

The motivational interviewing style facilitators have used all through this curriculum — in check-ins, discussions, and planning — is a learnable peer skill in smaller form: open questions that cannot be answered yes or no, reflections that hand a person's meaning back to them slightly clearer, and summaries that let them hear their own reasons for change. Its opposite, the righting reflex (Session 39), argues, warns, and fixes — and reliably produces a defense of the very behavior it attacks.

- **Questions open; verdicts close** 'What is the hardest part of tonight for you?' opens a door. 'You just need to get serious' closes one. A peer's questions make room; their verdicts make resistance.
- **Reflect before you respond** Hand back the heart of what they said — 'So the cravings hit hardest after your brother calls' — and let them correct it. Being understood accurately is itself an intervention.
- **Their step, their words** End with their next step in their sentence: 'So tonight you will call your sponsor before dinner — did I get that right?' A step they authored is a step they keep.

Sources & Evidence — Facilitator background — do not teach

Motivational interviewing research supports engaging ambivalence through open questions, reflection, and the person's own change talk rather than argument or shame, and MI-informed listening moves

are taught here as a peer skill (Miller & Rollnick, 2023; SAMHSA, 2019). Key sources for this session: Miller & Rollnick (2023); SAMHSA (2019), TIP 35. Evidence strength: Moderate as facilitation practice guidance; MI trial strength does not transfer to peer listening moves. Spiritual practice: Confession — correlates with safe disclosure and being heard without judgment; evidence: Moderate (Miller & Rollnick, 2023). Full citations: Appendix H. The session's Scripture material is in its optional handout (Appendix I), as theological foundation, quoted from the King James Version.

'Evidence strength' grades the correlated mechanism, not the spiritual practice itself

Pause midway through teaching: ask, "What part of that sounds most like your life right now?" Take two or three answers, connect them to the teaching, and continue. Teach in your own words — the bullets are your map, not a script to read aloud.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

1. Which is harder for you: asking, reflecting, or staying quiet while they think? Why?
2. When has advice — even good advice — made you dig in? What was happening inside you?
3. What topics are beyond a peer conversation and belong to staff, no matter how well you listen? (Review Session 45's lines.)

Skill practice (12 minutes)

Listening lab (in trios, two rounds): the speaker talks about a real but moderate current challenge; the listener may only ask open questions and reflect — no advice, no story-swapping; the observer counts advice attempts and notes the best reflection. Rotate so everyone listens once. The facilitator debriefs: what did the speakers' own next steps sound like?

Personal application — homework (5 minutes)

Hold one real peer conversation this week using the three moves. Write down the best reflection you offered and the next step they named, in their words, with their permission. Participants write it in their workbook before leaving. Facilitator: name the homework again at the door as people leave.

Facilitator notes and cautions

Peer conversations are not counseling sessions and are never a substitute for referral. If a conversation surfaces suicidal thinking, trauma detail that needs clinical care, or medical issues, the peer connects the person to staff under the crisis protocol — listening skill never delays escalation.

Closing (2 minutes)

Advice is cheap and usually refused. Being heard changes people. Practice the three moves until they feel like manners. Next session: your story — when to tell it, how much of it, and when to keep it holstered.

Fidelity check for this session: objectives named at the start ☐ craving scores logged ☐ skill practice completed in full ☐ homework written down by participants ☐ session note filed today ☐