

Leader Guide Sample

A Sample Leader Guide to Help You Facilitate With Confidence

Purpose of This Leader Guide

This Leader Guide Sample is designed to help pastors, marriage ministry leaders, and small-group facilitators prepare and lead a structured marriage ministry lesson with clarity and confidence.

The guide demonstrates how a Blueprint-based session can be organized around:

- A clear essential question
- A measurable learning objective
- Biblical instruction
- Facilitator modeling
- Guided practice
- Couple discussion
- Personal application
- Assessment
- Feedback
- Follow-up

This sample may be adapted for:

- Marriage ministry classes
- Couple small groups
- Church workshops
- Retreat sessions
- Husband-focused studies
- Wife-focused studies
- Leadership development
- Blueprint Series™ programs

The facilitator's role is to guide learning, encourage thoughtful participation, protect the group environment, and help participants apply the lesson. The facilitator is not expected to provide counseling, resolve private disputes, or answer every question immediately.

Sample Lesson Title**Listening to Understand****Lesson Focus**

This lesson helps husbands and wives recognize the difference between listening to understand and listening only to respond.

Participants will examine practical listening behaviors and select one behavior they can use during a meaningful conversation with their spouse.

Recommended Session Length

75 minutes

Intended Audience

Married couples

Group Size

Four to twelve couples

Session Format

- Biblical instruction
- Facilitator modeling
- Group discussion
- Private couple activity
- Personal action planning
- Closing reflection

Essential Question

How can husbands and wives demonstrate that they are listening to understand one another?

Learning Objective

By the end of the session, participants will identify two observable listening behaviors and create a plan to use one behavior during a conversation with their spouse.

Assessment Method

Participants will complete a written application statement identifying:

- One listening behavior they will practice
- One conversation in which they will use it
- When the conversation will occur

The facilitator will also use a closing reflection question to determine whether participants can answer the essential question.

Biblical Foundation**James 1:19**

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

Proverbs 18:13

“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”

Philippians 2:4

“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

Main Teaching Principle

Listening is more than remaining quiet while another person speaks. Listening to understand requires a husband or wife to pay attention, avoid interruption, consider the speaker's meaning, and confirm what was heard before responding.

A person may hear the words being spoken without understanding the concern, perspective, or request behind those words.

Effective marital listening communicates:

- Your words matter.
- I am giving you my attention.
- I want to understand your perspective.
- I will not assume I already know what you mean.
- I will allow you to complete your thought.
- I will confirm what I heard before responding.

Key Listening Behaviors

Participants should be able to recognize the following observable behaviors:

Giving Full Attention

The listener reduces distractions and focuses on the speaker.

Examples include:

- Putting away the phone
- Turning away from the television
- Looking toward the speaker
- Pausing another activity
- Choosing an appropriate time for the conversation

Allowing the Speaker to Finish

The listener does not interrupt, complete sentences, or immediately defend a position.

Asking Clarifying Questions

The listener asks questions to understand rather than to challenge.

Examples include:

- What do you mean by that?
- Can you give me an example?
- What part of this concerns you most?
- What would be helpful to you?

Restating What Was Heard

The listener summarizes the message in their own words.

Examples include:

- What I hear you saying is...
- It sounds like your main concern is...
- Let me make sure I understand...
- You are asking me to...

Acknowledging the Perspective

Acknowledgment does not always mean agreement.

Examples include:

- I understand why that mattered to you.
- I can see how you reached that conclusion.
- I recognize that you experienced it differently.
- I understand what you are asking me to consider.

Responding After Understanding

The listener waits until the message has been understood before offering an explanation, opinion, correction, or solution.

Materials Needed

- Bible
- Leader Guide
- Participant worksheet
- Pens
- Timer
- Whiteboard or presentation slide
- Listening scenario
- Application cards
- Feedback form

Room Preparation

Arrange the room so couples can sit together while still seeing the facilitator.

Recommended setup:

- Chairs arranged in a semicircle
- Couples seated beside one another
- Materials placed at each seat
- Minimal distractions
- Comfortable lighting
- Private space for couple discussion
- Clock or timer visible to the facilitator

Before participants arrive:

- ☐ Review the lesson.
- ☐ Test presentation equipment.
- ☐ Arrange participant materials.
- ☐ Confirm the room temperature.

- ☐ Prepare name tags if needed.
 - ☐ Place pens and worksheets at each seat.
 - ☐ Pray for the participants and session.
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Facilitator Preparation

Before leading the session, the facilitator should be able to:

- Explain the difference between hearing and understanding
- Identify the lesson's essential question
- State the learning objective
- Demonstrate ineffective listening
- Demonstrate effective listening
- Guide couple practice without invading privacy
- Redirect public criticism
- Recognize when private follow-up is needed
- Complete the closing assessment

The facilitator should also review the church's:

- Confidentiality expectations
- Safety procedures
- Referral process
- Pastoral reporting structure
- Participant conduct guidelines

Session Overview

Welcome and Opening Prayer

5 minutes

Group Expectations

5 minutes

Introduction and Essential Question

5 minutes

Biblical Teaching

15 minutes

Facilitator Modeling

10 minutes

Guided Group Practice

10 minutes

Private Couple Practice

15 minutes

Application Planning

5 minutes

Assessment and Closing Prayer

5 minutes

Detailed Facilitation Plan

1. Welcome and Opening Prayer

Time

5 minutes

Facilitator Instructions

Welcome participants warmly and thank them for investing time in their marriage.

Suggested opening:

Welcome to today's session. Our focus is listening to understand. Many disagreements become more difficult because one or both spouses begin responding before the message has been fully heard. Today, we will examine practical behaviors that can help husbands and wives listen with greater clarity and patience.

Open with prayer.

Sample Prayer

Lord, give us wisdom, humility, and patience as we learn. Help us examine our own communication and become more attentive to one another. Guide our words, our listening, and our application. In Jesus' name, amen.

2. Review Group Expectations

Time

5 minutes

Facilitator Instructions

Briefly review the expectations.

Say:

Before we begin, remember that each couple controls what they choose to share. We will discuss principles publicly, but private marital details should remain between spouses or be addressed through appropriate pastoral or professional support.

Review:

- Speak respectfully.
- Avoid publicly criticizing your spouse.
- Do not interrupt participants.
- Protect confidentiality.
- Share only what you are comfortable sharing.
- Focus on your own growth.
- Request private follow-up when needed.

3. Introduce the Essential Question

Time

5 minutes

Display or read:

How can husbands and wives demonstrate that they are listening to understand one another?

Ask participants to think about the question without answering immediately.

Explain:

By the end of the session, you will identify two observable listening behaviors and choose one to practice during a conversation with your spouse.

4. Biblical Teaching

Time

15 minutes

Read James 1:19.

Ask:

What sequence does this verse establish?

Expected observations may include:

- Hearing comes before speaking.
- Speaking should not be rushed.
- Emotional reactions should be slowed.
- Listening requires discipline.

Read Proverbs 18:13.

Ask:

What problem occurs when a person answers before fully hearing?

Possible responses:

- The answer may address the wrong issue.
- The speaker may feel dismissed.
- Assumptions may replace understanding.
- The conflict may become larger.

- The listener may respond defensively.

Explain:

Listening is not passive. It involves deliberate behavior. The listener gives attention, allows the message to be completed, clarifies meaning, and confirms what was heard.

Write or display:

Attention

Completion

Clarification

Confirmation

Response

Explain each step.

Attention

Give the speaker your focus.

Completion

Allow the speaker to complete the thought.

Clarification

Ask questions when meaning is uncertain.

Confirmation

Restate what you believe you heard.

Response

Respond only after understanding has been established.

5. Facilitator Modeling

Time

10 minutes

Use a volunteer facilitator, ministry leader, or prepared couple.

Scenario

One spouse says:

I was disappointed when we made plans for Saturday without discussing the family commitment already on the calendar.

Ineffective Listening Demonstration

The listener responds:

I did not know it was that important. You always act like I make every decision without you.

After the demonstration, ask:

- What listening problem did you observe?
- What assumption was made?
- Was the original concern confirmed?
- What might happen next in the conversation?

Expected observations:

- The listener became defensive.
- The listener interrupted the meaning.
- The response shifted toward blame.
- The concern was not restated.
- The speaker may feel unheard.

Effective Listening Demonstration

The listener responds:

Let me make sure I understand. You were disappointed because I agreed to the Saturday plans without first checking the family commitment with you. Is that correct?

The speaker says:

Yes. I wanted us to make the decision together.

The listener responds:

I understand. You are asking that we check with each other before changing plans that affect both of us.

Ask:

- What behaviors demonstrated listening?
- Did the listener agree with every detail?
- What was confirmed?
- How might this response affect the rest of the conversation?

Emphasize:

Confirmation does not require immediate agreement. It shows that the message has been heard accurately.

6. Guided Group Practice

Time

10 minutes

Read the following statement:

I have been trying to talk with you about our schedule, but the conversation keeps getting delayed.

Ask the group to create a listening response using this stem:

What I hear you saying is...

Allow several participants to respond.

Possible response:

What I hear you saying is that you have been trying to discuss our schedule and you are frustrated because the conversation has not happened.

Then ask the group to create a clarifying question.

Possible questions:

- Which part of the schedule needs our attention first?
- When would be a good time for us to talk?
- What decision needs to be made?
- What has made the delay difficult for you?

Provide feedback.

Feedback Guidelines

Affirm responses that:

- Restate the concern accurately
- Avoid defensiveness
- Avoid blame
- Ask one clear question
- Focus on understanding
- Do not add assumptions

Correct responses that:

- Include an argument
- Shift responsibility
- Minimize the concern
- Offer a solution too quickly
- Use sarcasm
- Accuse the speaker

7. Private Couple Practice**Time**

15 minutes

Facilitator Instructions

Explain that couples will complete a short listening activity privately.

Say:

Each person will have an opportunity to speak for two minutes about a low-risk topic. Choose a topic that is meaningful but not highly sensitive. This is a practice activity, not a time to resolve a major conflict.

Suggested topics:

- A scheduling preference

- A household responsibility
- A recent positive experience
- A family activity
- A small decision
- A personal goal
- A way to spend time together

Speaker Instructions

The speaker should:

- Describe one thought or concern
- Use respectful language
- Avoid accusations
- Speak for no more than two minutes

Listener Instructions

The listener should:

- Give full attention
- Avoid interruption
- Restate what was heard
- Ask one clarifying question
- Confirm the speaker's main point

After the first round, switch roles.

Privacy Reminder

You will not be asked to report the details of your conversation. We will discuss only what you learned about the listening process.

Facilitator Observation

Walk through the room without standing close enough to hear private details.

Observe only general participation.

8. Couple Activity Debrief

Ask participants to discuss only the process.

Questions:

- What helped you feel heard?
- Which listening behavior was easiest?
- Which behavior required the most effort?
- What made it difficult to wait before responding?
- How did restating the message affect the conversation?
- What did you notice about asking a clarifying question?

Do not ask:

- What did your spouse say?
- What issue were you discussing?
- Who handled the activity better?
- What disagreement were you trying to resolve?

9. Application Planning

Time

5 minutes

Distribute the application card or direct participants to the worksheet.

Ask each participant to complete:

One listening behavior I will practice is:

I will use this behavior during a conversation about:

I plan to have this conversation on:

One distraction I will remove is:

One sentence I can use is:

Possible sentence stems:

- Let me make sure I understand.
- What I hear you saying is...
- Is your main concern...?
- Can you help me understand what you mean?
- What would be most helpful to you?
- Did I understand you correctly?

10. Assessment

Time

5 minutes

Return to the essential question:

How can husbands and wives demonstrate that they are listening to understand one another?

Invite two or three general responses.

A complete answer should include at least two observable behaviors, such as:

- Giving full attention
- Avoiding interruption
- Asking a clarifying question
- Restating what was heard
- Confirming the speaker's main concern
- Waiting to respond until understanding is established

Collect or review the application cards as appropriate.

Do not require participants to reveal the topic of their planned conversation.

11. Facilitator Feedback

Provide general feedback to the group.

Suggested feedback:

Today, many of you demonstrated that listening can be made visible through simple behaviors. Full attention, allowing a spouse to finish, asking one clear question, and restating the message can change the direction of a conversation. The goal this week is not to have a perfect conversation. The goal is to practice one behavior intentionally.

Encourage participants to focus on progress rather than perfection.

12. Closing Prayer

Sample Prayer

Lord, help us become swift to hear and slow to speak. Give us patience when conversations are difficult and humility when our first interpretation may be incomplete. Help husbands and wives listen carefully, speak respectfully, and seek understanding. Strengthen every marriage represented here. In Jesus' name, amen.

Participant Worksheet

Listening to Understand

Essential Question

How can husbands and wives demonstrate that they are listening to understand one another?

Five Listening Steps

1. Attention
2. Completion
3. Clarification

4. Confirmation

5. Response

Personal Reflection

Which listening behavior do I already use effectively?

Which listening behavior do I need to strengthen?

What usually distracts me while my spouse is speaking?

What causes me to respond before fully understanding?

What sentence can I use to confirm what I heard?

Weekly Application

One listening behavior I will practice:

The conversation in which I will practice it:

The day and time I will have the conversation:

One distraction I will remove:

How I will know I practiced the behavior:

Optional Take-Home Exercise

Fifteen-Minute Listening Conversation

Schedule one uninterrupted 15-minute conversation.

During the conversation:

- ☐ Remove phones and distractions.
- ☐ Choose one low-risk topic.
- ☐ Allow one spouse to speak first.
- ☐ Listen without interrupting.
- ☐ Restate the message.
- ☐ Ask one clarifying question.
- ☐ Confirm the main point.
- ☐ Switch roles.

Afterward, each spouse should answer:

- What helped me feel heard?
- What listening behavior was most useful?
- What should we practice again?
- What should we adjust next time?

Facilitator Notes

What to Watch For

During the session, watch for:

- One spouse speaking for the other
- Public criticism
- Defensive reactions
- Forced disclosure
- Dominating participants

- Extended personal stories
- Private conflict becoming public
- Emotional distress
- Requests for counseling
- Safety concerns

Appropriate Redirection Statements

- Let us focus on the listening behavior rather than the private details.
 - Please allow your spouse to speak for themselves.
 - We are not going to resolve that concern publicly.
 - Thank you for sharing. Let us protect your privacy and follow up after the session.
 - Let us return to the essential question.
 - I want to make sure other participants have an opportunity to respond.
 - That concern may require pastoral or professional support.
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Possible Participant Questions**What if my spouse refuses to listen?**

Suggested response:

This lesson focuses on the behavior each person can control. You may practice clear, respectful communication and choose an appropriate time for the conversation. Repeated communication problems may also benefit from pastoral or professional support.

Does listening mean I must agree?

Suggested response:

No. Listening means accurately understanding what your spouse is communicating before offering your own perspective. Agreement and understanding are not the same.

What if the conversation becomes emotional?

Suggested response:

Couples may pause the conversation, agree on a time to continue, and seek support when needed. A pause should not be used to avoid the issue indefinitely.

What if I already know what my spouse is going to say?

Suggested response:

Assumptions can prevent accurate listening. Allowing a spouse to complete the message gives them the opportunity to clarify what they mean in that particular moment.

What if the issue is serious?

Suggested response:

Serious concerns may require a private conversation with the pastor, a qualified counselor, or another appropriate professional. The small group is not the place to manage a major crisis publicly.

Sensitive Situations

The facilitator should stop the public discussion and arrange private follow-up when a participant reports:

- Physical violence
- Threats
- Fear of a spouse
- Sexual coercion
- Child abuse
- Suicidal thoughts
- Serious addiction
- Stalking
- Immediate danger
- Severe emotional distress

Follow the church's safety, reporting, pastoral, and referral procedures.

Do not advise a participant to remain in immediate danger.

Do not attempt to privately investigate serious allegations.

Session Evaluation

Session Information

Lesson Title: Listening to Understand

Date: _____

Facilitator: _____

Number of Couples Present: _____

Learning Objective

Were participants able to identify two observable listening behaviors?

☐ Yes

☐ Partially

☐ No

Did participants complete an application plan?

☐ Yes

☐ Partially

☐ No

Was participation balanced?

☐ Yes

☐ Partially

☐ No

Did the session remain respectful and emotionally safe?

☐ Yes

☐ Partially

☐ No

Was the session completed within the planned time?

☐ Yes

☐ No

What Worked Well

What Was Challenging

Participant Questions

Follow-Up Needed

Changes for the Next Session

Facilitator Self-Reflection

After the session, reflect on the following questions:

- Did I explain the essential question clearly?
- Did I connect the Scripture to the lesson?
- Did I model the behavior effectively?
- Did I ask clear questions?
- Did I allow enough silence?
- Did I encourage balanced participation?
- Did I protect participant privacy?
- Did I redirect unhelpful discussion respectfully?
- Did I provide enough time for application?
- Did I assess whether participants understood?
- Did I identify follow-up needs?
- What should I improve before the next session?

Personal Notes

Leader Preparation Checklist

One Week Before

- ☐ Review the complete lesson.
- ☐ Review the biblical passages.
- ☐ Complete the participant activity.
- ☐ Confirm the room.

- ☐ Confirm participant materials.
- ☐ Review confidentiality procedures.
- ☐ Review safety and referral procedures.
- ☐ Contact the co-facilitator.

One Day Before

- ☐ Prepare presentation materials.
- ☐ Print worksheets.
- ☐ Prepare application cards.
- ☐ Test equipment.
- ☐ Review the lesson timing.
- ☐ Pray for participants.

Before the Session

- ☐ Arrange the room.
- ☐ Place materials at each seat.
- ☐ Confirm the timer.
- ☐ Review the essential question.
- ☐ Review the learning objective.
- ☐ Welcome participants as they arrive.

After the Session

- ☐ Record attendance.
- ☐ Review application completion.
- ☐ Identify follow-up needs.
- ☐ Contact church leadership regarding concerns.
- ☐ Secure confidential information.
- ☐ Complete the session evaluation.
- ☐ Prepare for the next lesson.

Suggested Follow-Up Message

Thank you for participating in our Listening to Understand session. This week, practice one listening behavior during a planned conversation with your spouse. Remember to remove distractions, allow the message to be completed, ask a clarifying question, and confirm what you heard before responding. We look forward to continuing the discussion during our next session.

Adaptation for a 45-Minute Session**Welcome and Prayer**

5 minutes

Biblical Teaching

10 minutes

Facilitator Modeling

8 minutes

Couple Practice

12 minutes

Application Planning

5 minutes

Assessment and Closing

5 minutes

For the shorter session:

- Use one Scripture passage
- Limit group discussion
- Use one listening scenario
- Keep couple practice focused
- Provide additional reflection as homework

Adaptation for a 90-Minute Session

Welcome and Prayer

10 minutes

Biblical Teaching

20 minutes

Facilitator Modeling

10 minutes

Guided Group Practice

15 minutes

Couple Practice

20 minutes

Application Planning

10 minutes

Assessment and Closing

5 minutes

For the longer session:

- Include additional scenarios
- Allow more guided practice
- Include a written reflection
- Provide time for questions
- Avoid turning the session into public counseling

Virtual Facilitation Adaptation

For an online session:

- Send worksheets before the meeting.

- Ask couples to join from a private location.
- Use the chat for opening reflection.
- Keep teaching segments brief.
- Use breakout rooms only for private couple practice.
- Do not place unrelated couples together for sensitive discussion.
- Provide clear breakout-room instructions.
- Use a timer.
- Confirm how participants can request private follow-up.
- Protect the meeting with appropriate security settings.

Final Leader Encouragement

Facilitating with confidence does not require having every answer.

Confidence grows through:

- Preparation
- Clear objectives
- Familiarity with the lesson
- Responsible boundaries
- Thoughtful questions
- Careful listening
- Prayer
- Honest evaluation
- Willingness to seek help

A strong facilitator does not dominate the session. A strong facilitator creates the conditions for participants to learn, reflect, communicate, and apply biblical principles.

The goal is not to produce a perfect group discussion. The goal is to help husbands and wives take one meaningful, responsible, and practical step toward stronger marriages.