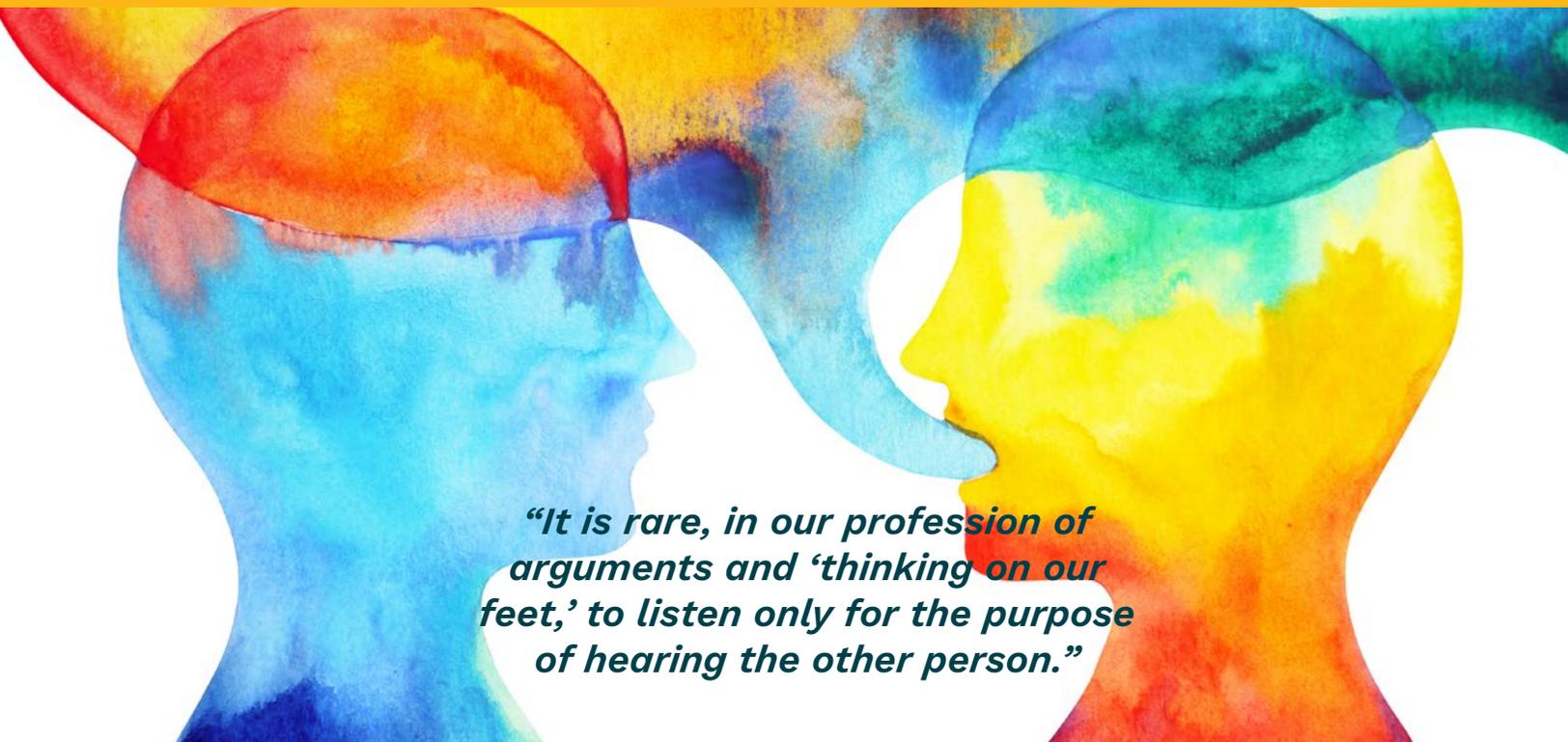




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“It is rare, in our profession of arguments and ‘thinking on our feet,’ to listen only for the purpose of hearing the other person.”

What Is Mindful Listening and How to Build Your Listening Muscles

By Kyra Hazilla

Mindful listening is a practice that centers the awareness of sound with attentive and connected social engagement. Mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, nonjudgmentally. By applying mindfulness to listening, we can bring our entire awareness not just to the speaker’s words, but also to their tone and sounds, the content of their speech, and their nonverbal and physical communication. When we listen mindfully, we are seeking deep understanding as we hold space for another.

It is rare, in our profession of arguments and “thinking on our feet,” to listen only for the purpose of hearing the other person. Frequently, we listen while preparing our response—waiting to jump in, contribute, refute, share our experience with the topic, or demonstrate our expertise. With families, friends, and loved ones, though, the gift of undistracted attention is vital to healthy relationships. When we practice mindful listening, we are better able to understand another’s point of view, emotions, and needs.

How to Be a Mindful Listener

- **Offer the speaker your undivided attention:** Turn away from technology, turn off the running commentary in your brain, and turn toward (literally and figuratively) the speaker.
- **Listen:** Listen to the speaker’s words, tone, expression, silence, and body language.
- **Gently bring your attention back when it wanders:** Like many mindfulness practices, we strengthen our skills by making mistakes. When your attention drifts—as often happens—bring it back with kindness. You are activating and growing the neural circuitry needed for mindful listening.
- **Ground yourself in curiosity and compassion:** Notice your natural curiosity when you are connecting with another person. Sometimes it is easy to fall into old patterns of urgency, judgment, boredom, or inclination to problem-solve. (Anyone who has ever been regaled with the entire plot of a Puppy Place chapter book knows what I mean.) Talkative young children can provide great opportunities to practice curiosity.
- **Respond with intention:** Use nonverbal cues of attention—such as nodding, leaning in, and eye contact—and verbal cues like, “uh-

huh,” “yes,” and “right.” See if you can identify the intention, the meaning, and the values underlying the words themselves, and reflect those back to the speaker: “Are you saying...?” or, “Tell me more about....”

- **Foster an attitude of nonjudgment:** We are professional critical thinkers and rely on those skills in the legal community. But to be mindful listeners, we must build our awareness of how quickly judgment creeps into our thought processes and interrupts more helpful strategies. Utilizing our well-trained lawyer minds to increase nonjudgmental awareness—aimed at both ourselves and others—can improve our well-being and relationships. ●

– KYRA HAZILLA
JD, LCSW, Director and
Attorney Counselor, OAAP



OTHER WORKS BY KYRA HAZILLA AT OAAP.ORG

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