



NHS Education for Scotland

Transcript of 'The Value of Listening' (NES Bereavement Webinar, 2022) video.

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**Lynne Innes (LI):** Good evening and welcome to the 16th NES Bereavement Webinar. And tonight's webinar is the value of listening and I'm delighted to have Brigid Russell with me here on screen. I'll introduce Brigid a bit more later on. I'll just tell you a little bit more about the kind of general housekeeping, so we are recording the presentation.

Any questions?

Answers will go up on our website in due course. I just didn't say to say that there won't be any names, or any other identifying information aim that will be shared. Just to let you know that everyone is muted, but you can submit questions and we'd really encourage you to do that, in which we will try to ask Brigid. Some of them aim throughout the webinar. So please just type in your question into the question panel. And if you have any questions after they bring our finishes or any queries about the recording, you can contact us at [sad.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:sad.scot.nhs.uk), after today's session, all of you who attend will be emailed a feedback questionnaire and we're really keen to hear your comments on the webinar, but also your thoughts about topics that you would like to see covered in future sessions.

So, I'm really pleased to have Brigid join us today. I met Brigid on Twitter through spaces for listening and it has been a joy to get to know her over the two years and really, really delighted that we were able to meet in person for lunch and just before Christmas. And for the first time and that was lovely, and Brigid lives in Stirling, she's a self-employed coach and consultant working with people across public and private sectors in Scotland. She believes in her relational approach to coaching and development, and that's why she's so drawn to finding and creating more spaces for listening to each other and having more conversations and really pleased Brigid that you're joining us tonight. I shall go off screen at the moment and leave you to start the webinar and join you in a short while. Again, thank you so much.

**Brigid Russell (BR):** Thank you. Thanks so much. And I'm really, really delighted to be here for this webinar as part of the series of NES bereavement webinars. However, I do have to admit to feeling a little bit terrified sitting here, talking to an audience I can't see about the value of listening, so please bear with me. I've done loads of listening over the past couple of years, but I've also become a bit of a semi recluse in that time. While getting used to living on my own and working from home. So, what qualifies me to talk with you all about listening as part of a bereavement webinar?

You may well be wondering that. I'm a coach so you could say that listening is a big part of what I do in doing my job. I think that that's in there. And later, I'll share some of what I've learned along the way and continue to learn about listening through coaching. Where I want to start though, is somewhere much more personal than that. It's about how and from whom I've learned the most about the value of listening.

You see, I, I don't think that listening is about expertise and skills. Yes, there might be some things that we can pay more attention to practice more, get better at doing. Essentially though. Listening is all about our humanity. Our empathy. And our curiosity about what's really going on for each of us. As well as for ourselves. Because I think we could all make more time and space to listen more to how we ourselves are really feeling and what we're really thinking. So, the personal thing. The person I've learned most from about listening over many years is my husband, Jim Russell.

Jim died of acute lymphoblastic leukaemia on the 6th of February 2020. A matter of weeks before the pandemic, he was diagnosed on the 19th of September 2019, and we've been together for 18 years. I thought so much over the past two years or so about how I introduced myself, how we choose to introduce ourselves, what we say, what we don't, what really matters.

And now after two years of living without Jim and living with grief. It feels really important to me to share with you that I was married to this amazing man.

Actually, it matters far more to me than saying anything much about my professional or educational background. Being married to and in love with Jim was and still is such a huge part of my identity. When he died, not only did I lose the love of my life, but it also turned my very happy life with him. Upside down. My life was no longer one I recognized in full. And then throw in the small matter of a pandemic and living alone in the middle of lockdown number 1.

And so, as part of this bereavement webinar, it feels really important to me to share more with you about my personal experience of loss and living with grief. I don't claim any kind of expertise through this, I'm simply sharing with you my experiences and I don't seek to impose any of them on you, but I do hope that perhaps my raw and messy insights might be of some interest or some help. So firstly, I want to share something with you about what I learned from Jim about the power, the sheer humanity, and the potential of really listening to each other. And secondly, I want to say more about the huge part that listening and being listened to has played for me over the past two years or so in living with grief and carrying on my life without the person I love. So firstly, what have I learned about listening from Jim?

Well, I learned to listen with curiosity, to be genuinely curious about the other person. To suspend my judgment about who they might be, what they might do to see the person to meet the person and to the heaven. Jim had this amazing capacity to meet people where they were to be really curious about the other person to put them at their ease and then simply to listen to what they had to say. I also learned to listen to the spaces. And to be comfortable with the silences, not to jump in and fill those silences, to listen with their musician's ear.

You see, Jim was a musician and when he listened to a piece of music, he could listen out for the bassline. Hear the different parts, listen to the spaces between the notes, and stand back too to hear the whole to hear the change in tempo.

To feel the light and the shade. So, I learned the importance of just listening. Taking the care not to interrupt too much to let the other person tell their story. Jim was a patient in Forth Valley Royal Hospital for a few short months, and I was alongside him, his wife, and also someone who works a lot with the NHS. I've reflected a lot on that time. As you can imagine, and I want to share something about those reflections as it relates to listening. So, Jim was a patient, yes, but he was also a brother, a father, a grandfather, a friend and a husband and he was a musician.

A very talented singer and songwriter. He was also a man who had fears about the diagnosis, his illness, and his imminent death. Though you wouldn't necessarily have known that from his very calm demeanour. Actually, his biggest concern was the impact of his death on all of his family on me. And the questions he wanted to ask were about how his palliative care would be managed and how it

would impact us. Our experience of the haematology and oncology teams in Forth Valley Royal was so that they understood all of that too. They always remembered that Jim was much more than a patient. He was a human being who was scared about being ill with leukaemia. And he's very happy and comfortable. Life had been turned upside down overnight. This is a two-way thing though. Jim also remembered that the doctors, the specialist cancer nurses, the student, nurses.

The healthcare assistants are human beings too. He always took the time and trouble to ask how the staff were when we met them week after week in the Oncology Day unit. And he listened and he remembered the details. When the consultant had to tell us both on the 16th of December that the chemotherapy hadn't worked, and the diagnosis was Terminal Jim took in that news for a few minutes quietly. Turn to check on me. And then he looked back at the consultant and he said I'm really sorry this must be really hard for you to have to say this to me. And when we were back just after Christmas to discuss Jim's palliative care, he apologized to the consultant for taking up too much time. He'd seen how busy the clinic was that day, and this consultant quietly said.

We can take as much time as you need. It's important that you feel able to ask questions you have. And she listened to Jim when he explained that he was hoping to record an album in a professional recording studio, and she took the time and the care to check in on how that was going.

Every time we were subsequently in the hospital for Jim's blood transfusions throughout January. So, what's the point in me sharing all of this? Well, my point is that listening is a two way, and it is a relational thing. It's not about skills, clever tricks and techniques. It's about being human. And it is about giving each other the time and the space to connect and to feel heard. Jim and the consultant were human beings first and foremost, and they listened to each other, and they heard. So secondly, I want to say something about my personal experience for the power of listening in living with grief. Some of you may know that I've spent a lot of time over the past two years.

Being involved in something called space for listening with my colleague and friend, Charlie Jones. We've convened and participated in over 230 of these spaces for listening two or three every week since May 2020. With different one-off groups of eight people over zoom. Essentially, it's a space which lasts just under an hour, and it's a structured space in which each of the eight people takes it in, turns through three rounds to speak for two minutes in response to a prompt uninterrupted, and we're each listened to. The principles which underpin this simple approach are that there is equality of listening that each person gets an equal amount of time to speak uninterrupted and to be listened to by the other seven people. There's no hierarchy or formality of role. We don't introduce ourselves by role, grade, profession, organization.

We just meet simply as eight people who are going to listen to each other and feel heard. The structure of the space is held by someone in the role of facilitator Charlie or me in this case, but it's not an expert role and we also take a full part by taking our own turn in each of the listening rounds. The prompt in the first listening round is how are you? And what's on your mind? The power of that question has stopped many of us in our tracks in the early days of the pandemic. In particular, there were so many people who came along to a space for listening who commented that no one had asked them that question or if they had been asked it. They didn't feel truly listened to when they tried to answer it.

And the thing is, there's such healing power in being just listened to. Just listening. We say that don't we all I did was just listen to her. But just being listened to. Is cathartic? It's affirming and it's uniting. It connects us to our shared and common humanity, especially during the unrelenting and gruelling experiences of living with the pandemic. In listening, we are bearing witness to each other to our pain,

loss, grief to our fears of uncertainty, of change of disruption. So why did we start spaces for listening in the first place?

Well, both Charlie and I had a strong sense that we all need more space and more space for listening. And our respective experiences his as a clinical psychologist in Bristol and mine as a coach and leadership consultant working with people across health and care. Was that it felt even more pressing during the early days of the pandemic, and it continues to be the case in my view. So, I'd just like to share a little more of my personal experience through spaces for listening. I didn't set out thinking that spaces for listening would help me in the process of grief. But being listened to and listening to others has helped me immeasurably in coming to terms with loss and living with grief. I felt, heard and seen. I have felt like people meet me where I am. They don't jump in with too much sympathy and they don't offer fixes and answers and interpretations of what I'm experiencing. They just listen and that lets me feel heard. And that's enough. Actually, that's more than enough. And I don't necessarily need to talk about grief every time, and I don't necessarily talk about grief as sadness. Sometimes it helps me more than anything else to be able to laugh and recall many of the light and humorous parts of my life with Jim. And it feels so natural to be heard saying them.

So, spaces for listening is not about our wellbeing intervention. It's not about doing things for or two other people. It's about listening to each other and connecting as fellow human beings in a space which feels safe enough, trusting enough and non-judgmental. And what we find time and time again with each different group is that we have more in common in our experiences, concerns, hopes and fears than we have differences. Grieving coming to terms with losing the person you love. Healing. Finding a different way of living alone. All of this does take time, and it's intensely personal, and it's far from straightforward. How we make sense of grief? How we make sense of what's being going on over the past two years of the pandemic. This understanding this sense making this is fundamentally important to how we heal. And what can help? Well, I think it's about how we connect and how we relate to each other and central to how we connect and how we relate to each other. Is the quality of our listening. Listening is hard to do well, and consistently. I'm not going to put a gloss on that or pretend that there are some easy shortcuts. I just know that when you feel really listened to and when you listen to someone deeply, it makes a world of difference. So, building on some of what I've already shared, there are three questions about the value of listening that I want to explore further here.

Firstly, what are we listening for? Secondly, why is listening so very important and what gets in the way of listening? And thirdly, what does it take to listen and to listen well? So, if I turn to that first question, what are we listening for? For many of us in our professional roles, we listen for the key facts in our interactions to reach a diagnosis. To find some kind of convergence, to agree or disagree, perhaps. And that kind of listening has its place. Of course, it does.

But when I think about what we're all living with, whether that's grief. And bereavement or coming to terms with the pressures of the pandemic, and I think we all need much more of another kind of listening to. To listen without an agenda with more curiosity with fewer interruptions and with less need to jump in and check the facts. When we experience listening like that, I think we're actually able to hear more. To understand more about each other by listening beyond our formal role by quietening our assumptions by being alongside each other as people first. I could have introduced myself to you very differently. I could have focused on my expertise as a coach, my qualifications, the work I do. And I wonder how you might have listened to me differently.

And what assumptions you might have been holding about me. And as you sit and listen to me now, I wonder what you're hoping or expecting to hear. Some handy hints and tips about listening well something you can agree with something which resonates with your own experience. So, my key point here is listening how we listen can play a huge part in helping us to heal to create a culture together

which is truly focused on our wellbeing. And that isn't about neat and bounded interventions. It's about the space we create and the care we take to listen to each other.

So, what if we can listen to each other beyond our formal role and professional position? Listen to each other as fellow human beings. Take a bit of a risk. Bring more of ourselves, perhaps be prepared to show our vulnerability. What we find in spaces for listening is that by taking this risk, showing up as ourselves, not as our roles and professional identities, we find trust between us in the moment, and we find it so much easier just to listen to each other.

The structure of the listening rounds holds that too, and it's amazing how much can be shared and how much you can learn about each other in just two minutes of listening. And we realized that just listening to each other is healing and restorative. We don't need to do anything special. We don't need to offer each other solutions, we just need to listen. Of course, I'm not saying that that's the answer to everything, but it is a pretty fundamental foundation on which to build. So, if I reflect for a moment.

On what everyone in this audience might be living and working through right now. Then I am pretty sure that there are times when each of you could really do with someone simply asking you how are you. And what's on your mind? And then giving you the time and space to really answer that honestly and to listen to you. So, I'm going to ask you now to reflect on that question quietly for yourself. Don't speak to anyone else or distract yourself. Just take a bit of time to reflect on that question. How are you? And what's on your mind? And after this webinar, you might want to ask that question of someone else you meet and really listen to their answer.

So, I'm just going to invite Lynne to back in for a few minutes.

**LI:** Thank you, Brigid. That was very powerful and very moving. Thank you for sharing that. If people have some reflections on what you've heard so far, or any questions that you'd like specifically to ask for Bridget on what you've heard so far, and please do. comment your reflections on what you've heard, and I will, ask, I shall cause them to Brigid. We'll just wait for a moment, and if anybody would like to put any comments in the question panel.

I'm just going to ask you a question Brigid and it's when you were talking about listening. How we listen and how it's hard to listen. And I think one of the things that I've always worried about or have in my mind when I'm listening to someone in my role as clinical role, particularly that people are, if I'm quiet and silent and we're quietly listening to people. And we're not saying much, we're quiet and we're kind of really being present, really holding the space. But I always kind of worry that people are thinking I'm doing nothing in that moment.

And no rescuing or intervening with advice or whatever they're thinking, well, she's not doing anything to contribute here because she's just sitting quiet. Yes, so to some of that I might pick up in what I'm going to go on and say after this. two immediate reflections, one is to share with you that so many people who've been along to spaces for listening, many of whom come from all sorts of I mean all sorts of backgrounds. But lots of people from the health service and many in clinical roles. Lots of people have said to me afterwards that they really, you know, we all know how to listen, but it wasn't until they were in spaces were listening that it's kind of really brought home to them what actually listening for two minutes without interrupting because you can't on the. You know, as you know, having been in the zoom call, you're unmute, so you actually can't.

Even if you want to and people have realised that in listening to someone else it's made them think quite differently about when they go back to their own team or to, you know, as part of their clinical role, where two minutes it feel it isn't that long, but it actually feels like quite a long time that you're

actually listening to someone and they've realized the value of letting somebody continue their own thoughts and say what they need to say and that. While it might feel like a long time when you're when you're listening to someone, if you're the person speaking, 2 minutes actually gives you a chance to get your thoughts out. And so that's one reflection that looked after people.

Also, few weeks ago I was running a session with a group of AHP's, and we were talking about the. You know that the more you could hold back on or when you hold back on jumping in with the immediate reflection, either because you want to, you know, you think you know what the issue is, and you want to fix it. So, it comes from a really genuine positive place, but actually that sometimes people need that little bit longer even though it might feel uncomfortable to hold the silence. To get to what the actual issue is so you know. So, by jumping in with the first response, even though it comes from a positive place, we might actually be taking the conversation off in a different direction to you know what the person speaking was intending, so I don't know if that answered you. And in fact, that there are some comments and questions now and somebody saying thank you Brigid.

I often find that I use silence to the point of being on the cusp or feeling uncomfortable. For me, this is the vital time of people opening up.

**BR:** Yes, absolutely yeah. Yeah, I mean the classic one for you know that's often quoted around GPS about, you know that moment when just when the patient to leave their surgery and they turn and say actually don't turn. And then the real issue comes out. So, there's yeah, there's something about what's the extra space that lets people and it's not very much time. I don't think that's it really. And someone saying listening is healing and restorative.

What a beautiful articulation for leaders to hear. Even when change is difficult. So, the questions are kind of jumping about a little bit. Do you ever worry about what you might hear? Is that our own discomfort of hearing someone's pain? A barrier to really listening. Yeah. So, I mean if I just. Think about that through the lens of grief I am very aware that actually reflected a lot in the last couple of years about how I have been able to share about my grief in spaces for listening with people I don't really know more than with sometimes with my own family or people.

I'm really close to and some of that I think is about what I perceive as the fear from the other person of this person. Is grieving what are they going to say and what if I can't? What if I don't know what to say? What's the right thing to say and? So yeah, I'm answering it from a different angle, I suppose, but I sometimes find myself leaping in to make it alright for the other person. You know you're on. It's about grief and illness.

And Jim definitely did that. He definitely stepped in and said a lot to make other people feel better. And I suppose what I've learned is that you know the. Actually, as someone grieving, the worst thing is when somebody just says nothing about it and I'd rather some said the wrong thing than that they. Then that they say no.

So yes, I think there's I'm going to say a little bit more about fear, and I think the fear comes into it a lot. OK, and I think we've heard that certainly within the bereavement team that that people want to hear. Wouldn't want it to, you know, want to be heard and want to see something rather than say nothing about at all? Yeah. Someone saying how wonderful and countercultural take 2 minutes of silence in a webinar? Thank you.

And someone else saying just want to say thank you so powerful to stop and listen to. Someone asking can this type of listening be done within a team or is it too personal? So, the spaces for listening as an approach has been, I mean as you know, Lynn because I know you've used it within a team, so are

using it within a team and we've and Charlie and I have been asked that question a lot, because, well, sometimes the question comes from people their own experience of you know.

So, they meet seven other people who are essentially strangers, and they say I can't imagine doing this in the team that I've worked with for a long time, but there are. There are examples of people in quite a few different. Organizations you've taken on the approach, and they are using it with people that they either within their own team or that you know that they don't work with directly, but they know each other. So, it is possible to use it. It does take a bit more careful positioning and, but it does, but it does work, but I think it will feel different, but I think it would be great if you kept the place where we could actually have that quality of listening with people that we work with a lot. Yeah. We've used it in a team, and it does feel like we had to work at it differently. Yes. Because you, I suppose it's when you when you don't know someone, you're not making any assumptions about them. Or you might be, but not sort of so.

And you're just you're just genuinely listening, whereas if you know someone you might, you know some of the history and it's different. It's different. So perhaps it's yeah, yeah, you contract for how you prepare for it, so yeah. Ok, I'm going to ask you to continue and thanks very much everyone for putting your comments and questions. And please do add in anymore as we go on.

Thank you, Lynne. Thanks so much. So, I'm so I've got. I've got about 10 minutes more of the things to share, and so as Lynne said, if you have any other comments or questions, please do keep posting them and we'll come back to them afterwards. So just picking up from where I've where I've left off before the space and what I continue to learn in my coaching and said I'd come back to my coaching is that people need space. We all need space. We need space to pause, to think. To hear ourselves think to say how we're truly feeling and to be listened to. So, if I consider that a second question that I posed a bit a while ago, why is listening so very important and what gets in the way of listening? So, I've always thought that listening is important and no more so than now.

Over these past two years, there's been so much noise, continues to be so much loss and grief, so much trauma. And I really wonder how we'll be able to heal and recover from this time.

And I think it will depend so much on how we feel able to share how we're really feeling how we really listen to each other, and whether we feel heard. So, one book that I've come across in the last couple of years is by somebody called Rachel, Naomi Remen, and it's called Kitchen Table Wisdom and she writes engagingly about the healing and restorative power of listening to pick up that phrase.

She's a doctor, and she shares a number of stories and anecdotes which come which capture that power of bearing witness to another person of not jumping in straight away, to diagnose or to fix the other person of listening to them deeply. And in so doing, finding that the quality of your presence and your listening can be so much more of what's actually needed by the other person.

So, I think it's sometimes takes putting aside our formal role and our professional expertise for a wee while and just being present with each other as people. But creating that kind of space alongside each other's. Not easy to do. Perhaps it feels so much easier on the face of it to keep on rushing by than it does to pause and to listen to each other with care and compassion and curiosity. But I really worry about the quickening pace across health and care just now. Yes, of course, there's so much going on and there's so much to be done, but if we keep on rushing past and not pausing to find out how each other is feeling, the thoughts and the ideas that we each have, then I think we risk missing so much. So just thinking about some of those questions just then what gets in our way.

And I think in what gets in our way of listening, and I think that there's a lot in this that's about fear. I think it's about fear of being and of bringing ourselves. And fear that just listening will not be nearly enough. Or maybe to pick up that last question. We fear what we might hear from each other that we might not understand that it might overwhelm us, or that we'll feel unable to do anything to fix it. But what if we don't have to provide answers and solutions necessarily?

So, when I share with you about my grief, I'm not looking for an answer because there isn't one really. I just need to feel seen and heard. To say my feelings out loud to hear myself. And to feel understood for where I am. So, I just said a little bit about that with Lynne, and I've been reflecting a lot about what's the wrong and the right thing to say. And there really isn't a right and wrong thing to say. What's hardest for me as someone experiencing grief is when somebody avoids mentioning Jim.

Because they think if they mention him, it might upset me. But the point is that he's not here and I miss him. And you mentioned someone mentioning him doesn't cause that. Actually, not mentioning him feels harder, much harder.

And to mention another book that I really, really recommend and love is a book by someone called Doctor Kathryn Mannix and, in the books, called Listening and she writes really compellingly the power of listening to understand. She covers with such sensitivity and grace, how we might approach those conversations which we are fearing. So, I'm with Kathryn Mannix.

Let's not label those conversations, difficult conversations, and imagine the consultant who had to tell Jim his diagnosis. I'm sure that felt like a really difficult conversation, but as soon as we've labelled it difficult, perhaps we make that a self-fulfilling prophecy. And I think it's more important to reflect on what exactly makes those conversations loom so large in our minds as difficult.

So, Kathryn Mannix says, let's spend more time on preparing for how we listen for longer to the other person rather than for what we are going to say. Take our cues from the other person. Find out more about their fears, their concerns, their needs. Before we jump in with our assumptions. Kathryn Mannix caused these tender conversations. How we can be ourselves sitting with the other person paying attention to our own and each other's feelings far more than worrying about what is the right or the wrong thing to say. So, what else gets in the way of our listening to each other?

Maybe we're apprehensive about surfacing disagreements and being confronted by our differences that it might lead to conflict that it might threaten or challenge something we feel or believe. So then many so many of our conversations stay in a polite territory, skating past any differences in attempt to converge and resolve, or they dissolve into polarized debates in which no one is really listening to anyone. But what are we missing out on by doing that? Because I think we need the divergences we need to find out more about what each other is thinking feeling we need to seek out real understanding. It can feel difficult to listen out for the difference it takes.

Being comfortable with uncertainty, and it means we need to listen beyond our assumptions and our usual expectations.

But The thing is, the differences are there whether or not we choose to ask about them and listen to them. And we've found over and over in spaces for listening that just listening to seven other people is hugely affirming and reassuring. We hear our differences, and we actually find that we have more in common than divides us by listening for that little bit longer. And it is only two minutes, after all. Many people reflect on how little they are actually practicing true, listening in their day-to-day work and home conversations. So many of us, if we're honest. Just listening long enough to come in with our next point. So, I encourage you to try it in your next meeting or your next conversation at home. Listen



for that wee bit longer without interrupting and just see what happens. So, the third and last question I want to consider is what it takes. What does it take to listen and to listen well?

So, I've said already. I do know that there are some skills that we need to listen well, but I truly believe that listening is about something so much more fundamental than skills. It's about how we are prepared to show up to be alongside the other person to be genuinely curious about what's going on for them. To listen while I think we need space, we need to be in the right space to listen to the other person with all of our attention to be there to be present.

So, I reckon that a lot of people will be thinking that really listening takes too much time and we don't have that time. But what I've experienced in spaces for listening is the power of being listened to for two minutes. It might not sound long, but it's incredible how much you can say and how hurt you can feel in two minutes. The thing is, the quality of the presence of the other seven people, so we need a space, and we need to leave space when we listen. Don't jump in and fill the silence just because you feel awkward, or you perceive that the other persons uncomfortable. I've learned that over the years, as I've learned that over the years as a coach, when you're listening to someone, the silence might seem to last in age. But if you're lost in your thoughts, reflecting on what you're going to say or how you're going to answer a question, it doesn't feel like any time at all.

And I've really learned as a coach, to let go of the worry about what's the next best question Catherine Manno talks about that too. Don't worry so much about using the wrong words or being a bit clumsy but do be human. Be there and keep on listening. And be prepared to be yourself. You can still be empathic to someone else by sharing something of yourself. Your presence in a conversation, your curiosity, and your care for the other person.

That's what will create the quality of listening. That will mean the other person feels truly seen and heard. And remember that we are listening for so much more than the words someone chooses to say. When I think about what's truly helped me to come to terms with and live with grief, there have been many times with tears and there has been much laughter too. These things aren't opposites. They don't happen at separately demarcated and neat times. They're all jumbled up. The light with the shade. So, on that note and by way of picking up on where I started, I just wanted to end by sharing something with you that I wrote back in October.

And I said about that. We need to listen to ourselves too and over these past two years walking and being in nature and listening to myself has been so important in living with grief and in finding time to heal. So, I hope you won't mind if I share this poem with you. It's called 'No words' A quiet grief unfolds in solitude. She walks amongst the shimmering trees and hears the singer. Through him speaks the things she sees in silent observation and uplift sunlit Fern. A bright illumination and a moment held there. In the shadows of the woods.

She suddenly struck dumb. No words to find beyond the aching tears held back, not there where she's alone but here in company where tears cannot fall. A speaker without voice.

**LI:** Thank you. Thank you Bridget I could really see the uplift Fern. with the sun shining through it in my mind. Anyway, thank you so much that was that was lovely. There have been a few more questions come in. If you're happy to answer. Someone asked is there a special listening language for you? A special listening language.

**BR:** Umm? Uh. I'm not, I'm not quite sure how to answer that. I do know that I've had to think a lot about how I get in the right place to listen. So that's not quite. I don't think I'm quite answering the question, but this is how I'm going to interpret it. And at the beginning, just after Jim had died and at

the beginning of the pandemic, I had to think a lot about can I coach other people? Which is, you know, the fundamentally about listening to other people when I have so much gone on in my head, in me. And I thought about that a lot, and I continue to have to think about that because there are days when I don't feel in the best place. And actually, sometimes it's so it's about preparing for it. But then, actually? I find that it really helps me to quieten what's going on for me and to listen to someone else and really be there for them, so I'm not sure I've answered that question, but that's the answer.

That was a mean question to start with. So that was a good question that's quite interesting to think about a special listening language, yeah? And few people saying thank you so much and it's been a pleasure listening to you and thank you for sharing your story. I think that's really important that you hear that. And someone asking in the three rounds. What are questions? Two and three?

OK, so round one is how are you and what's on your mind and then round two is rather than a question. It's an invitation to share your reflections and feelings now and in the light of round one. And then the third round is. To share anything that you're going to take away from the call, and anything that you've heard that has resonated that you've appreciated. So, the flow of those. And it's always the same prompts that we use the idea behind it. The flow is that the first question opens things up, and some people stay quite broad, but some people do actually go quite deep in that first round. The second round always deepens, and people say more, they say more about their own. Reflections on what's going on for them.

Quite a lot of people comment on what others have said, but not in the notion of jumping in to provide solutions more. Feeling affirmed by something that somebody's else has said, or the resonance of what somebody else has said. So, we go much deeper in round two and then round is A way of bringing it back out and using affirmations and appreciations of others. So that's the flow.

**LI:** Thank you. And somebody's asking, what if you were able to listen and want to help people explore aspects of their grief? Are unable to retain a lot of information. Then how can you listen articulately? So, I'll say that again What if you're able to listen and want to help people explore aspects of their grief? And I'm not sure if it's they're unable to retain a lot of information, or if it's you as the listener. How can you listen articulately?

**BR:** OK, so I guess I'll kind of partly answer that with kind of my I suppose a coaching mind in some. And the longer I coach, the more I do truly believe that most of us have the answers to the stuff that we're facing.

And actually, what we need is the space to hear ourselves say the situation out loud and be listened to, and maybe have some questions asked that help us to explore more about open questions that help us to explore it more. And what that enables is, as I say it enables some. Sometimes. If I then relate that to my own experience of grief and what I've shared, and it's basically listening sometimes, I don't really know how I feel about something until I say it out loud. And then the most, I think the most powerful thing we can do for each other is just to listen to let the person speak.

Because if as soon as if you come in with a suggestion or another question, it might take. That person, often in another direction, and that was a lot in that sort of social confidence. So, I think if. And especially if relating to grief in particular, that's why I said what I said at the beginning? I don't presume to, you know, just because I've dealt with grief in the way that I have.

I don't presume that would work for anyone else. So actually, sometimes I really genuinely believe that the most powerful thing we can do for each other is to let each other's say, how we are experiencing it without saying well. It's like this, or maybe you'll find that and often that comes from a really positive

intention, but it can take you know how we each experience something like grief will be very personal. So, have I answered that question?

**LI:** Yeah. And yeah. Someone's commenting that a young person they were working with today was surprised by her approach of being quiet and giving her space to talk. However, your questions would have also been very useful, so I will definitely be using them next week. Thank you.

And just. Yeah, somebody else and thank you so much for this webinar. Certainly, given our lots to think about and to take forward to support our clinical team.

**BR:** Great.

**LI:** And somebody asking if we respond too quickly, we run the risk of covering the hidden concerns and emotions. Actually, it's not a question Sorry it's a comment which I think you can have said. Sorry, I'm just. Looking through them, there's a few have come in now. And there's this question is do you think our lack of physical connection impacts on listening?

**BR:** That's a really interesting question, and if you had asked me that question in 2019 and I'd said, oh yeah, as a coach I'd have said, oh, I can't, you know I can coach people remotely, but only after I've met them face to face. And then the pandemic and coached anyone in person since about December 2019. And it really works, and maybe that's so now it really works, and maybe that's because we've all had to get used to it. But actually what? When we started? So that's coaching, but with spaces for listening when we started it, we had no idea at all whether it would work to be doing it on zoom, but what we found is we've had quite a lot of people say, and I've experienced this myself.

They've compared the nature of that space, and it's only eight people, so you can see all eight people on the screen. I think that really matters, actually. And but a lot of people have said I kind of forgot that it was zoom. I felt like we were in the room together. I that's probably been the circumstances. We've just had to get used to it. And we have. And so much and I think it's being very intentional about that. But also, so I've become so used to it now that I'm slightly terrified about going back to face to face, which is a whole another thing was something about living on my own, has become a bit weird.

Not weird so yeah. So, I think it's possible to do it, but I think we have to pay attention to it and I think there are lots of examples of online meetings that do not feel like that, so it doesn't just happen. I think you have to pay attention to it.

**LI:** Just don't, I just think I haven't asked this question before. This is just my question, so there's eight people in spaces for listening generally, you wouldn't have more than that, but how did you arrive at that decision?

**BR:** And so, it's the magic number, yeah? One of the I think it's Charlie's favourite number, no When he worked out the timings of three rounds with each person getting two minutes and allowing their time as it comes to 50 minutes usually goes a little bit over that, but never over an hour, and so there was a very practical thing which was that length of time is practical and feasible. And what we found through experience. So, seven works. Seven or eight works best. At a smaller number than seven, we've done it with six.

Just because people have dropped out at the last minute and it's OK, but your turn comes around really quickly. There's some, so five or six is just too few below that. Certainly, too few, because there's something about what people say is the power of listening to six or seven other people. Is such a big part of it. I think people come under spaces for listening, thinking yeah, of course, I'm going to get a lot

from being listened to uninterrupted, and what they go away with is almost more of an appreciation of. How much they get from the power of listening to seven other people.

So, there's something about that with seven or eight, it feels like the right length of time between each turn. More than eight we have done it with nine and it almost becomes too much. You're having to concentrate for too long.

That's kind of why 8.

**LY:** Yeah, thank you. I think I've asked most of the questions. They kind of jumped about a little bit, so it's been difficult keeping track of them all, so my apologies I have missed questions and I noticed that Phil's popped in the chat that we will pass any questions on to project that I haven't asked. I follow that up a few more people saying that they've loved this.

Thank you so much and a little love heart beside it and thank you and a smiley face. So yeah, I think that. People have very much appreciated you talking today. Bridget. Thank you so much for taking the time and sharing. Sharing your story with us as well.

**BR:** Thank you for inviting me and just on a really practical thing. I mean, as you've already said, I'm very, very happy to pick up on any questions afterwards by email.

But also, if anyone who's listening wants to experience spaces for listening, they're very welcome.

And so, what I'll do is if I give you, well you've got my email address and contacts, Lynn, and I'm very happy for those to be shared with people.

So, if you're on Twitter and you can follow me on Twitter, you'll see we say quite a lot about spaces for listening, so I'm @bridgetrussell51 On Twitter, but very happy for people to come and experience spaces for listening if they're interested.

**LI:** Thank you so much. And as someone who's experienced basis for listening a few times and actually now offering spaces for listening, I we certainly commend that you try it. So, thank you everyone for joining us webinar tonight and we do have a list of previous webinars as was on screen there just now. It's just going to the next slide.

Our next webinar is that on the 26th of May at 12:30 and it's supporting people who are bereaved in primary care and we'll soon be advertising that if you would like to sign up for that, and if you'd like to sign up for our quarterly bereavement e-newsletter.

The details are on the screen about how you do that now and do look at the SAD website, the support around death website and lots of interesting events and all of the educational resources are available there too.

And so just like to say thanks again for everyone who joined, but also everyone who submitted questions and comments and shared some of your own stories. it actually felt like a.

Wow, I didn't feel like a webinar. It felt like a lovely kind of sharing of stories and conversation.

So, thank you so much everyone.

Goodnight.

The film was produced in April 2022 and can be found at [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or <https://vimeo.com/707758233>

For more information visit [www.sad.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.sad.scot.nhs.uk) or contact [supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:supportarounddeath@nes.scot.nhs.uk)

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