

# LARA Method

LARA= Listen  
Affirm  
Respond  
Add

**LARA** is a tool used to communicate across differences. We find that regular use of this tool helps to reframe one's ability to engage in conflict empathetically in a way that invites diverse perspectives in an effort to create shared meaning.

## STEP #1: LISTEN

*Actively Listen - When one listens actively, they are more likely to hear a person's emotion and understand their experience.*

**Listen to what the person is literally saying.** In trying to understand what might be behind their words, you don't want to miss what the person actually said.

**Let empathy guide you to understand what lies beneath their words.** Withhold judgement. Do their words and inflection reflect fear, frustration, or some other truth? While it's important not to make assumptions, we must also recognize that things are not always as they appear. Consider the intention behind the words; in some cases, the impact of a statement is different than the true intention.

**Pay attention to body language, both yours and the speaker's.**

- Notice what the speaker is saying through their body language. Pay attention to facial expressions, body positioning, etc.
- Face the person directly, maintain appropriate eye contact, nod in approval or agreement when you feel it, and reflect the speaker's words through facial expressions.

## STEP #2: AFFIRM

*Affirmation involves expressing that you value someone's contribution to the dialogue and also establishes a shared sense of humanity before diverse and potentially conflicting perspectives come into play. Affirmation is a critical step in the process, even in situations in which you do not agree. Although it is not a natural process for many of us, it gets easier with practice.*

**Be genuine and truthful in your affirmation.** It's generally best to speak spontaneously from the heart rather than to develop "pat" answers. An affirmation is not an agreement; it is an opportunity to find authentic ways to connect with another person.

**Paraphrase the content of the speaker's words.** This step is especially helpful in confirming that you and the speaker are on the same page. If you can put what the speaker says into your own words, it demonstrates you've listened attentively and allows the speaker to correct or clarify any misunderstanding.

**Express a connection between what the speaker said and what you heard.** It could be a feeling, an experience, or a common principle shared with the other person.

**Express an appreciation for honesty and authenticity.** Even when you disagree with the other person, you can still recognize the courage it might have taken the speaker to share.

## STEP #3: RESPOND

*Through connecting with the speaker, you have created a space where conflict can be constructive and shared meaning can be created. Responding goes beyond restating the speaker's words and intentions; it is an opportunity to react honestly, to name the impact of the speaker's words, and to actively engage in a conversation across difference.*

**Respond in an honest, respectful, and thorough manner.** If the person asked a question, do your best to reply honestly. If you agree with their statements, tell them that. If you disagree, share your authentic thoughts.

**Avoid debate.** Rather than looking for right and wrong, try to articulate areas of conflict and difference, as well as places of agreement. Instead of judging other viewpoints as inferior or invalid, try to challenge the preconceived notions of everyone involved.

**Use "I" statements.** Own your beliefs and experiences.

## STEP #4: ADD INFORMATION

*Now that you have shared your opinions and feelings, you can enrich the conversation with relevant facts and information. While in a debate adding information is used to prove your point, in the context of dialogue, this stage allows everyone involved to look for shared meaning and build relationships across difference.*

**Share additional information with the speaker.** Additional information may aid in understanding the issue in a new light or redirect the conversation in a more positive forum. It's also an opportunity to state relevant facts and unpack arguments and statements. Some other possibilities include offering resources, such as books, organizations, or specific people.

**Acknowledge complexity.** It is very unlikely that anyone has complete understanding or absolutely comprehensive information, particularly about the experiences of others, and there are often grey areas or additional issues that depend upon various contexts and perspectives. These are opportunities for growth and learning for all participants.