

## CASE STUDY: ONE SMALL STEP LIVE!

Watch the event here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yi-Uz3eykKI>

### Overview



In November, one week before Thanksgiving, One Small Step hosted a live virtual event designed to help people prepare for challenging conversations with family and friends during the holidays. The event focused on building practical listening skills, particularly for situations where disagreement, strong emotions, or long-standing tensions might arise at the dinner table.

## ONE SMALL STEP

Welcome to OSS LIVE!

Navigating Challenging Conversations  
with Family & Friends

STORY  
CORPS

Rather than offering advice on what to say or how to persuade others, the session introduced a specific skill-based framework drawn from the One Small Step **Active Listening** toolkit. Participants were invited to practice listening for values, emotions, and relationships, and to reflect back what they heard without trying to fix, correct, or win the conversation.

The full recording of this event is available at the link above.



### Approach

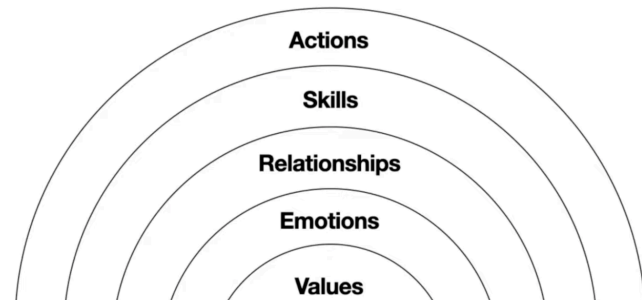
The live session followed a clear and deliberate structure that balanced instruction, practice, and reflection.

The event opened with a brief check-in, inviting participants to share what they personally find most difficult

about talking with family and friends during the holidays. Responses surfaced common challenges, including strong emotions, fear of conflict, and concern about making others feel defensive or uncomfortable.

From there, facilitators introduced the **listen and affirm** framework, which emphasizes shifting attention away from debating facts or positions and toward understanding the experiences and values underneath someone’s views. Participants were guided through five layers of listening: actions, skills, relationships, emotions, and values.

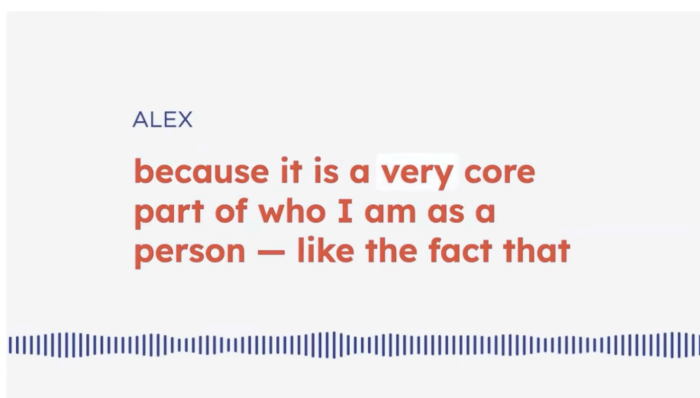
## Layers of Meaning



To practice the skill, participants listened to short One Small Step conversation clips and were asked to write affirmations in the chat as if responding directly to the speakers. The exercise intentionally focused on reflection rather than agreement, reinforcing that affirmation does not require sharing the same beliefs.

The session then moved into small group breakout discussions, where participants could talk through their own experiences navigating disagreement with loved ones and reflect on how the listening tool felt in practice. Ground rules emphasized curiosity, use of “I” statements, confidentiality, and acceptance that conversations may remain unresolved.

The event closed with a group reflection, inviting participants to share one takeaway from the experience and consider how the listening practice might apply beyond the holidays.



### Key Insights & Lessons Learned

One of the clearest lessons from the session was how unfamiliar many people are with listening without preparing a response. Participants noted how challenging it felt to focus fully on another person’s words without mentally rehearsing a rebuttal, personal story, or piece of advice.

The exercises also highlighted how affirmation can shift the tone of a conversation without resolving disagreement. By reflecting values or emotions rather than arguments, participants saw how conversations could remain human even when perspectives differ sharply.

Facilitators were explicit about the limits of the tool. The practice was framed as most useful with people who have an existing relationship and mutual interest in staying connected. It was not presented as appropriate for situations where someone is seeking conflict, persuasion, or public debate.

Another recurring insight was that practicing the skill silently still matters. Several participants noted that even imagining how they might affirm someone changed how they listened, regardless of whether they spoke out loud.

## Ground Rules

- Be curious and welcome other perspectives.
- Use “I” statements.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Contribute to the conversation equally.
- Stories stay, lessons leave.
- Accept that things may be unresolved.

### Step 1: Listen

- Listen to a 2-minute OSS clip.
- Full attention on what the speaker is saying.
- Try to put yourself in the speaker’s shoes.

### Notable Outcomes & Key Takeaways

Participants left the session with a shared language for thinking about disagreement differently, particularly the idea of attending to the “why” behind someone’s views rather than the details of the argument itself.

Many reflected that the practice felt difficult but worthwhile, and that it helped surface a deeper desire for connection over correctness. Rather

than resolving specific conflicts, the session offered a repeatable framework participants could adapt to their own families, relationships, and communities.

This live event directly reflects the **Active Listening** activity available in the One Small Step DIY Resource Center, demonstrating how the toolkit can be used in virtual group settings as well as one-on-one conversations.

**This case study highlights programs adapted from One Small Step toolkits. Visit [diy.takeonesmallstep.org](http://diy.takeonesmallstep.org) to explore the tools.**