

2.3 Use A Talking Stick

Pick an object and decide that only its holder can speak.

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When you find yourself in an environment where people are frequently interrupting each other, this tool can help to eliminate (or at least drastically reduce) interruptions, increasing the quality and depth of the conversation.

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- Helps keep discourse peaceful and free of interruptions.
- Everyone feels heard and respected.
- There's more space to express complex or difficult topics.

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- Everybody must agree to abide by this method, which can sometimes be tricky.
- When you have something really pressing to say, you may find it hard to pay attention to others.

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This tool can be useful in a broad range of settings, from work meetings to personal conversations to the family dinner table. It's valuable in both personal and formal settings; you may want to explore it simply when you want to hold a sharing session with a partner or friends. Mediating exchanges with a talking stick can be an excellent way to foster intimacy.

First, it's crucial that everyone in your group agrees to use this technique, as it is only effective when people are on board with it. When everyone in the group consents, choose an object that will become the speaking object for the duration of your conversation. Traditionally, people often use a stick as the object, but for practical purposes, it can be anything small enough to hold but large enough for others to easily see.

The agreement in a talking stick circle is that the only person who can speak is the person holding the object. When one person has taken their turn, they put the object down somewhere everyone else can reach it or pass it to someone else who has indicated that they would like to speak. The object should never be grabbed by force, only picked up or given voluntarily. This technique gives everyone a chance to express themselves and have the opportunity to be fully heard. The other participants might want to keep a paper and pen ready to note down any thoughts they would like to share when it's their turn to hold the stick.

For this tool to be effective, it relies on all participants respecting one another and, for example, not keeping hold of the talking stick for an unreasonable length of time. Whenever you're holding the talking stick, you have a responsibility not to abuse your privilege.

On the other hand, if you want to speak, you can request that the holder pass the talking stick to you, although they are not obligated to respect your wishes. Using a talking stick can reveal conversational dynamics that previously went unremarked, such as one person holding the floor for

an excessive period or another feeling too shy to take their turn. At its best, this tool can be a way to heal those dynamics and ensure that everyone gets a chance to contribute to the conversation.

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The Speaker-Listener Technique:

https://3.nd.edu/~pmtrc/Handouts/Speaker_Listener_with_Example.pdf
