



# SUN SHEN Communication Method

## Overview of the Process

### Step 1

- **Person A:** Listen to Understand.

### Step 2

- **Person A:** Clear your mind and remain silent (except for affirming noises like 'mmmm,' and 'uh-huh', which are highly recommended!).
- **Person B:** Present your side.

### Step 3

- **Person A:** Ask the person to expand, clarify or provide an example.
- **Person B:** Have patience: they don't know.

### Step 4

- **Person A:** Reflect / Mirror the other person's thoughts and feelings .
- **Person B:** Give feedback on their Reflection / Mirroring.

### Step 5

- **Person A:** After repeating back to the other person what they said, if you feel you got what they were saying, confirm whether the other person feels you heard them.

# Details For Each Step

Pick one person will be listening first (**Person A**) and one person who will be sharing first (**Person B**). Follow the steps below, and the the instructions for your role under each step, completing each step before moving on to the next.

Once you have completed all 5 steps and **Person B** has been fully understood, you will then switch roles and go through all the steps again, where the person who listened now gets to share their perspective until they have been fully understood.

## Step 1:

**Person A:** Listen to understand.

Listen to focus on the other person and to understand what their feelings, needs and thoughts are. Do not listen to respond with your opinion or to counter what the other person has to say.

Examples of how to start:

*“Do you want to talk about it?”*

*“Are you ready to start talking about it?”*

*“What’s going on?”*

*“Is there something you would like to talk about?”*

Depending on the situation you may want to ask them if they are okay or how they are doing before getting into the processing.

## Step 2:

**Person A:** Clear your mind and remain silent (except for affirming noises like ‘mmmm,’ and uh-huh’, which are highly recommended!).

Try and get their point. Do not get caught up in the details. For instance, do not correct them on non-relevant accuracy or detail. Look to see what they are trying to convey, what they are trying you to get. Do not prepare counters, give advice or solutions, or present your perspective on it. If you are trying to give your opinion, you are not listening. You are trying to talk about yourself instead of understanding what the other person is trying to say.

Do not say anything unless it relates to what the other person is trying to say. Remain silent, and clear your mind of what you want to say.

**Person B:** Present your side.

Do not try and counter the objections you are anticipating from the other person, unless you are agreeing with them. Do try and use analogies that would make it easier for the person to understand what you are saying.

### Step 3:

**Person A:** Ask the person to expand, clarify or provide an example.

If there is something you don't understand, ask them questions until you feel you do understand.

Some questions you can ask:

*Tell me more about that. (Expand)*  
*Could you give me an example? (Clarify)*  
*Can you explain that a different way? (Clarify)*  
*How did you feel when that happened? (Clarify)*  
*What happened next? (Expand)*

**Person B:** Have patience: they don't know.

Explain as if you were explaining it to a 4th Grader. Don't assume that they should know however simple and apparent it seems to you. You can ask, "It seems you really don't understand this, is this correct?" to confirm when you are getting frustrated and you will be surprised by their answers.

### Step 4:

**Person A:** Reflect / Mirror the other person's thoughts and feelings

In the other person's words, restate what you heard, both the ideas / thoughts and the emotions. Then verify the accuracy of your understanding.

Do not offer advice or tell them your own experience. Your goal is to focus on them and not make this about you. Sharing something vulnerable about yourself can be fine, but often we camouflage it with our own victories, so better not try.

When confirming your understanding of what the other person said by mirroring, do not use words that put you in a place that makes it awkward for the other person to correct you if you got it incorrectly.

Instead of using words where the other person has to make you wrong if you misunderstood them, such as:

*"You are saying ..."*  
*"You meant ..."*  
*"I know what you meant was ..."*

Use the following kinds of words that leave room for you to be corrected:

*"I feel what you were trying to say ..."*  
*"I think what you were saying..."*  
*"My perception..."*  
*"If I am not mistaken..."*

This creates openness and safety for the other person to speak up without too much confrontation or contention.

**Person B:** Give feedback on their Reflection / Mirroring.

If the other person got what you were saying for the most part, but missed some portions of it, do not say:

*"No, you missed what I was saying..."*  
*"No, that was wrong. You missed..."*  
*"No, that was not what I said. I said...."*

We tend to focus on what people miss instead of giving credit for what they got right and then giving them feedback on what they may have missed.

The following are some examples you can use in case they got some of it right and some of it wrong:

*"That was good. I felt that you got some of it and you missed some of it. I felt you got it when you said... I also said..."*  
*"Yes that was good! I feel like you understood me when you were saying.... One thing you may have missed is...."*

## Step 5:

**Person A:** After repeating back to the other person what they said, if you feel you got what they were saying, confirm whether the other person feels you heard them.

You can ask:

*"Do you feel I heard what you are saying?"*

If yes, confirm whether they feel you got their point, whether they feel you really understand what they are trying to get across. Sometimes, even if we get the right words, they will feel that you didn't understand them. This is most likely because the feel is off.

You may have gotten the logic of what they are saying but they can tell you still cannot relate to what they are saying. They don't feel emotionally understood.

You can ask:

*"Do you feel understood?"*

*"Do you feel I captured what you were trying to say?"*

*"Do you feel I got the point you were trying to get across?"*

If the person says yes, then it is your turn to be understood. Ask permission to present your side. You can say:

*"Ok, can I say a few things?"*

*"Since you had a chance to show your perspective, can I show you mine?"*

*"Ok, now that you feel understood, I would like to respond to some of the things you said, would that be ok?"*

If the person says yes, then, you can say:

*"Now that I can see your perspective things make a lot more sense. I feel like explaining what's been happening on my side will bring us even further on the same page."*

Now you can start from the beginning with Steps 1-5, but with the other person listening to you to understand you.

If no, then you should confirm:

*"Do you feel I heard what you were saying, but I didn't get the spirit of what you're trying to say?"*

*"Do you feel I got at least the words right, but for some reason it still doesn't feel like I am getting you, what you are trying to get at?"*

If the person says yes, confirming that you got the wording right, but they still don't feel you get it, then ask them:

*"Ok, so if you feel I got the wording right, but for some reason you feel like I am still not getting what you are trying to say, what do you feel is missing?"*


*If the person is having trouble, then give a few suggestions to help them out, such as:*

*"Do you feel even though I can repeat back to you, I still don't get how you are feeling about it?"*

*"Do you feel I am not feeling empathetic even though I can say what you are thinking?"*

*"Do you feel I am too distant and don't care what you are feeling even though I can get the words?"*

Or anything else that you may get a hunch about.



Then go back to Steps 1-4 until you feel you captured the emotional content and are ready to do Step 5 again.

If the person says no, then ask them what else is missing. Then go back to Steps 1-4 until you feel you are ready to do Step 5 again.