

Talking and Listening: How “In Depth Communication” can Strengthen your Personal and Family Life.

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I. Active Listening – Listening is not a passive behavior but an active process that involves choices for how to respond to the speaker. Active Listening has four main parts. They are paraphrasing, clarifying, giving feedback and listening with your body.

A. Paraphrasing – After hearing what the speaker initially says, the listener provides a mirroring statement letting the speaker know they were heard. A good paraphrase can be developed by beginning with one of the following phrases:

So you are saying...In other words...If I understand you correctly...What I hearing you saying is that...Let me get this straight...

After paraphrasing is complete the speaker should have the sense that they were heard and are understood. The listener, however, does not have to agree with what was said.

B. Clarifying – After giving feedback, the listener should clarify. This is done by gently asking questions about the presented topic and making sure there are no misunderstandings. Clarifying should make the speaker feel important and that their concerns have value. The listener also should be sure to have a goal of understanding and not interrogating.

Ask the “who, what, when, where” questions to make sure the speaker is understood.

C. Feedback – After paraphrasing and clarifying give feedback. Feedback is a supportive yet honest expression of one’s opinion regarding the topic. Feedback should be given at the same time as the discussion because the speaker is then more likely to listen. Feedback gives the speaker an understanding of the impact of their language and it can provides a fresh point of view.

Feedback should be honest but supportive. For example to say "I think you may have made a mistake" rather than "You blew it!"

D. Listening With Your Body – Listening with your body is an unspoken gesture that makes it easier for the speaker to talk. This can be done in many ways. For example,

Maintain eye contact, move closer or lean forward, nod as positive reinforcement, smile or frown in sympathy, keep posture open, remove distraction and remove objects between self and presenter.

II. The Use of Self to Increase Communication – The quality of communication can be increased by paying attention to how one's self is being used. The use of one's self is the alteration of things in the relational context that already exist but may be unclear, normalized, taken for granted or ignored.

A. The Art of Being Quiet - Both listeners and presenters maintain an unspoken time limit on the accepted length of silence. Altering the length of silence before responding to a presenter can have a positive impact. Consider following these suggestions.

Wait longer before responding to create an atmosphere of calm and listening.

Wait longer before responding to allow the speaker to look internally and reflect.

B. Boundaries – Boundaries are the spoken and unspoken rules, roles and limitations relevant to the relationship and context. Boundaries involve issues of time, authority, submission, involvement, distance and resources. *Communication is greatly increased when boundaries are clear and verbalized. Boundaries are determined usually by the person in authority. When boundaries are clear, it allows for safety, freedom and self development. Here are examples of clear boundaries.*

Job descriptions and work roles are clearly understood and well managed.

When a listener is clear and consistent regarding how long he or she can listen, what topics can be heard and how much he or she one is willing to do.

When someone is willing to say "no" to tasks that are too big, inappropriate or out of line with expectations.

When a manager listens to an employee or colleague in the same location each time they talk.

C. Self Disclosure – Self disclosure is sharing information about oneself that is somewhat personal. When a listener self discloses he or she is giving an unspoken suggestion that the speaker self disclose as well. Consider using these ideas:

Think about what you would like for the speaker to say that would move the discussion in a direction you would like. Based on this topic, pick something from your life that is personal and share it. The speaker will hear this and most likely respond with a personal example on the same topic. (If you want someone to talk about their mother than start by talking about your own mother.)

Self disclosure allows the listener to control the discussion by setting the parameters of what is acceptable. In other words, the level and detail of personal disclosure is determined by the listener.

The listener should be sure to only share as much as he or she can manage emotionally.

III. Responding To Criticism – Responding to criticism has to do with one's reactions to negative words about one's self or behavior. How we respond to criticism determines if the communication will be productive or nonproductive.

A. Acknowledging – Acknowledging is saying one agrees with the criticism but not necessarily agreeing with how it is said. Acknowledging criticism allows one to decrease the amount of defense in the relationship and productively discuss change.

"You are late again."

..."You are right. I was late."

B. Clouding – Clouding is helpful for responding to manipulative putdowns of which you disagree. Do this by agreeing with part of what is

said while holding your position. It decreases a defensive atmosphere and communicates a willingness to change while holding one's ground.

'You work too much. You think the world will fall apart if you take a day off.'

... "You are right. I work too much."

C. Probing – Asking questions following criticism to understand if it is constructive or manipulative. Listen to the main concern then restate it in a question.

'You do a poor job and you are not pulling your weight anymore'

... "What is it about my work that bothers you?"

IV. Imago Communication - Imago Communication is a technique developed for marital therapy with the primary goal of developing relational intimacy. Proper Imago Communication will allow for the speaker to begin relating current conflicts to childhood experiences and emotions.

A. Mirroring – Mirroring is simply a repeat of what was heard by the speaker.

So you are saying...Is there more...let me make sure I have it all...

B. Validation –Validation is a statement that the speaker's perspective is reasonable. Validation is not necessarily agreeing with the speaker, however.

That makes sense because...Can you help me understand?

C. Empathy – Empathy is the act of putting oneself in the position of the speaker and imaging how it would feel to experience their position.

I can imagine you feel...

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