

LISTENING

Listening to our children is one of the most important steps to creating a safe environment for them to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings about the world. In the 21st century, we have become so busy with our lives it is difficult to stop and understand what our children are trying to tell us. We don't intentionally shut them out. Rather, our lifestyles have changed from the 50's when many women stayed at home to take care of the family. In many homes men and children returned home each day to an environment where many basic needs were being met by mother. For example, many families ate dinner together. Today, instead we have both parents working, families consist of two income households that provide the equivalent lifestyle of the past. Furthermore, lifestyles have changed and divorce rates are on the rise. Many families are split up where children are passed between parents. With more single family household,s children are spending more time home alone. As a way to persevere, parents have adapted to the pressure of balancing work, household responsibilities, family recreational activities, and financial responsibilities. Many days, we simply move too fast for developing good relationships with our children. Our conversations will be rushed or minimized because our schedules don't permit enough time and space for deeper and meaningful contact to take place. We simply need to take a deep relaxing breath and turn our attention towards our child. Young children may need to be redirected to another activity. Parents need to become awareness of their resistance to the conversation.

Basically, everyone wants to be a good listener and parent to their children. We may even proclaim to be a good listener. And, yet many of our conversations are pressured and rushed between daily routines and activities. We have learned to usher our children off to different activities and school programs. We do all of these things in the name of good parenting and to provide the best for our children. Sometimes, we try to make up for the mistakes of our parents.

Most of us grew up forgetting how to truly listen without superimposing our own ideas, previous experiences or agenda into the conversation. Frequently, we assume to know what is going to be said and why. Or, we're off onto another subject before our children stop speaking. Our minds move so fast it's hard to tell if we are really paying attention and hearing the true messages our children are imparting. One of my personal favorite examples of unconscious listening occurs when one of my children has spoken to me and I haven't a clue of what he just said. Oftentimes, I would be to embarrassed to say, "I'm sorry. Mom was distracted and I didn't hear a word you said." Instead, I may move onto the next topic without reflecting back to them my understanding of the conversation. My unconscious avoidance of the topic would only create frustration on the other end. Many times they would say, "Mom, your not listening to me!" When my youngest son, Brandon was three, he would take my head in both hands and turn my face toward him. He wanted me to pay attention to what he was saying.

Listening is an art. It is a primary relational skill that is learned throughout one's life. Scientist now say that hearing develops before birth around five months. This discovery indicates that on a very subtle level listening happens before birth. Different sounds are heard in the womb that are comforting. The mother's heartbeat and the vibration of the expansion and contraction of her breath. Other sounds penetrate the layers of flesh that surround us while in the womb. We hear the echoes of our mother's voice, our father's voice and our siblings. Sounds and noises come into our experiences without any preconceived ideas of their origins. A non-

verbal state of listening occurs naturally while we are nestled in our mother's womb. We begin to recognize and respond to the sounds we like or don't like. The vibrations of sound permeate our whole experience and are interwoven in a full bodied experience of listening. The sound and the subtle vibrations coming from our mother can be considered our first experience of life. Neonates, have a natural sensitivity to the vibrations of sounds around them.

After birth, in the next phase of listening, children learn to respond to the tone, pitch and volume of their mother's, father's, sibling's, and extended family voices. They begin learning cues to the volume and pitch of the voices around them. Babies already recognize the tone and quality of their mother's and father's voice. The sound and vibration of a mother's voice is very comforting to her newborn baby. Simply, babies listen to sounds throughout their waking state. The sound permeates all of their experience. It is one of the initial ways they make contact.

Infants pay attention to their mother and father by listening to many different signals from tone and quality of voice, body language, and the human consciousness that is transmitted between them. In child research, psychologist noted that an infant in the crib will turn its head slightly towards the parent who is speaking. Infants and young children naturally respond to parents command of the space. They learn to understand by verbal, non-verbal and physical cues of the parents. Infants are very sensitive to the physical, emotional, and psychological space or human consciousness that surrounds them. There is an invisible energetic resonance that is developed between the mother or (caregiver) and her newborn child. The mother's consciousness is expanded to include her newborn. The newborn is aware of the invisible field of consciousness provided by his/her mother. After all, he/she was embodied and one with Mom's consciousness for nine months. The space of consciousness between mother and newborn can be inclusive of the father and all other family members. Many newborns recognize their father's or sibling's voice.

One place we can witness the non verbal consciousness field between mother and her newborn occurs around breast feeding. Mother's breast often begin responding to their infants feeding time moments before a verbal cue comes from the baby.

In the third phase of listening children learn about rules. Rules are a container or boundary. They give an experience for children to learn listening skills and roles. They provide a safe environment for your child's well-being and health. There are both unspoken and spoken rules where children learn how to listen and communicate with their caregivers. Removing an object from your child's reach is an example of both a spoken and unspoken rule. By placing the object out of reach, the child learns certain expected behaviors. Usually children learn the sound and meaning of the word "No" at the time the parent places the object out of reach. Many children try relentlessly to get to the object until the task of learning what the word "No" means. The child learns when objects are placed outside of its reach, they are not okay to play with. Eventually, children learn the unspoken rule, "when objects are placed out of reach they are not to play with them." If, parents are inconsistent and ineffective in teaching what they mean when saying "NO" children between the ages of 3-18 months may learn to whine and beg for things they want.

Many parents usually submit to their children's whinny behavior and give them things to make them stop. Other parents, say "NO" inappropriately. The usage of the word "NO" in these cases can be antithetical to healthy behaviors that are part of a child's natural development. Both examples, create a breakdown in communication,

and the understanding of learning the sound and meaning of the first spoken rule. The power of the spoken word, "NO" and its vibration is imprinted into your child's memory. This basic rule setting can set the tone for your child's ability to listen to you and follow directions. If used appropriately, it can set the template for your child's learning to follow rules and negotiate with others.

Frequently, infants and toddlers explore their surroundings and learn many other rules about boundaries and space. They meet these challenges by listening to the verbal and non-verbal cues of the mother, father, or caregiver. Parents and caregivers continually negotiate the space for their young children to explore and be a part of a social system. How many times have you seen a mother or father chasing their toddler at the store or a social gathering? The parent is redirecting-- helping their toddler learn the rules about space. This is the time you see many fences go up in backyards. I remember one spring afternoon while stepping outside with Brandon when he was one and a half, he took off running in the yard and went into the neighbor's yard. He ran through four yards before I could reach him. He had no sense of the boundary and space of our yard. The world was wide open and he was going to join it. I was out of breath by the time I caught up to him. Soon afterwards, we were one of those families who erected a fence. As he got older, he began to unconsciously and consciously learn rules and hold our yard as part of his safe space and boundary.

Another set of rules and boundaries are set when children begin to play side by side with other children at home or in nursery school. Before you are ready your children are off to school learning how to listen to teachers and other children. They pick up both verbal and non-verbal signals from each person they meet. They learn to respond and reflect to others their understanding of the communication directed towards them. Young children have a highly sophisticated and natural sense of listening. This teaches them to adapt their behavior based on the feedback from other children and parents. They learn to build on previous experience and to develop a new sense of space and boundaries. New rules are introduced

Listening is a natural skill which is interdependent upon the parents and caregivers ability to share in the listening experience. So, why as parents have we forgotten how to listen to our children? It could be, that over time we have become frustrated with our own parents, teachers, friends or bosses who don't seem to really hear us. Possibly, the pace of our daily lives keeps us too far forward in time or stuck in a past event and out of the present moment with our children. In our minds we are going through problems at work, reviewing our daily to do list, planning the next activity, calculating the expenses, conversing with someone else, or simply ruminating about our life. It's not that we don't intend to listen to our children we simply need to relearn how to create the space in our minds and hearts. We need to relearn the simplicity of listening and our own innate abilities.

What happens when we continually disconnect or fail to be present with our children? The repercussions of our "behavior" are being seen on a national and global scale through the violence being perpetuated by children who are looking for revenge because they have not been heard or seen.

Example:

Recently, my eight year old son, Brandon, and I went out for sushi. While waiting for dinner to be served he began speaking about, the latest Pokemon fad and I felt myself begin to drift away. I thought if I ever hear about these characters again I'll just scream. As I was just getting ready to change the subject I realized, I needed to

listen to him. These characters were important to him. There are over 133 different characters and I was beginning to feel a little intimidated by his memory of all the facts and information. I made a conscious decision to join in the conversation and began asking questions. I realized although the topic wasn't one that interested me, my son was enthusiastic. I thought to myself, wow if he could learn all these characters and their different abilities, his brain must be developing a highly sophisticated process of sorting and categorizing. Wow, that would be the equivalent of memorizing all the vertebrae in the spine.

I became aware that my conscious presence creates the space for my son to develop his interests and express himself verbally. If I would have cut him off and changed the conversation it would have only served my interest and possibly created a narcissistic wounding.

Conscious Listening Skills

1. Acknowledge your child is talking to you
2. Awareness of your resistance to the conversation
3. Acceptance of their reality even if you don't agree with it
4. Accommodate: hold the space of the conversation
5. Alignment
6. Authentic
7. Atmosphere

Acknowledge your child is talking to you

Acknowledge your child is talking to you by making good eye contact. This helps them know you are listening. Many times when children speak to us, we inadvertently excuse them. We unintentionally dismiss children while being occupied with daily routines, watching TV, talking on the phone, or reading a magazine. Sometimes, we cringe at the thought of being bothered. Our busy schedules don't permit us the luxury of stopping what we're doing. Even if you don't have time to talk in the moment, you do have time to make good eye contact with your child and communicate a better time for the discussion.

Resistance to relaxing and letting go into listening has become a natural response to an over busy schedule or not wanting to be interrupted because you believe the magazine you're reading or the TV program you're watching is more important than spending a few moments with your child. How many times have you said "Wait a minute until I finish this program or article, or conversation" as an excuse for teaching your child good manners. If you forget to get back to them in a timely manner, the child builds a tendency towards resentment and disrespect for the adult. As a result of the frustration the child inadvertently develops poor listening skills.

I am not saying that children don't need to learn good manners and respect for adults. I'm addressing the times we put off paying attention to our children because we feel inadequate or unable to cope with daily living or we believe the last minutes of the Oprah is more important. Sometimes we escape living life and avoid these relationships because we lock ourselves away in work, books, TV, and running from activity to activity. We forget the simplicity of actively being with a child's conversation and the essence of their expression.

Awareness of your resistance is a positive movement towards letting go of the resistance. Recognizing your resistance allows you to become an active partner in

the listening experience. In the moment it is important to acknowledge your child's desire to communicate with you and make a conscious choice as to whether or not you're willing to take time to listen or is it better to wait. Now is a good time to make positive eye contact and specify when you are able to talk.

Acceptance of their reality even if you don't agree with it

Accepting our children's ideas, thoughts, and feelings about a particular topic is a necessary step towards good communication and listening skills. Many times you may disagree with their ideas or thoughts of why they are feeling a particular way. Instead of holding the difference of opinion, you interrupt before they're finished speaking. Simply, you forget to observe the origin of your own thoughts, ideas, or feelings before starting to correct theirs. By cutting them off you teach them that your world and thoughts are more important. Unknowingly, you close off communication and forget to teach your child a healthy way to investigate their thought process.

Children need to express themselves and need guidance from us in how to observe their own thinking and feeling process. If children feel judged, humiliated, or unheard by adults, they will shut down the lines of communication and learn not to listen to us. Respecting children by listening to them helps build strong inner character. Children learn to express their ideas clearly and are open to investigation for the outside world.

It is a necessary step in emotional and mental development to provide space for our children to have their experiences heard by the people they respect.

Accommodate: to hold the space of the conversation

Children need us to accommodate our busy schedule to provide a space so they can be heard. Many times we are asked to set aside a project to be present for our children. If we miss the clues that indicate they need our attention in the moment, an opportunity is lost for contact and communication.

Alignment

Parents are so busy juggling so many tasks it is important for them to take a moment to align their intention to listen to their child. Choosing to align your intention to listen can bring you closer to your children when they are talking. Your being fully present in the moment helps the lines of communication stay open.

Authentic

Children know when we are too busy to be with them. Even in the best attempts you can see the frustration on your child's face when they are trying to speak with you and you have several other items on the agenda. Children feel rushed to get their message across and to meet your busy schedule.

Atmosphere

Choose the right atmosphere in which to have a conversation. Most subjects of a conversation can happen in the moment. Other topics need the right atmosphere for discussion. Many families choose the dinner hour to check in with each other and discuss the day. Other families eat together less frequently because both parents are working or taking kids to activities. Finding a time when all family members are together in a relaxed space is important to healthy psychological growth of each family member.

For example, you wouldn't want to talk with your teenage son about his poor report card while he is outside playing basketball with his friends or at the dinner table around other children. The atmosphere you choose for the conversation is important. It is the parent's responsibility to set the atmosphere for the conversation. Choose a time when you can explore the problem together without disruption or feelings of humiliation or embarrassment. Often, subjects for conversation have a time and a place. It is important for parents to set the rules and boundaries around creating the right atmosphere when a topic needs addressing. The boundaries are important to set in both directions. Children shouldn't demand answers to important questions while you're on the telephone or driving away in the car. Topics of importance require the right atmosphere for the conversation. Many parents say "Yes" to their children's request while they're on the run.

Some Examples of Unconscious Listening:

1. Abandon
2. Abusive
3. Accusatory
4. Afraid
5. Antagonistic
6. Avoidance
7. Authoritative
8. Anxious
9. Analytical
10. Attached
11. Appease

Healthy Conscious Choices

- a. Exercises to recognize consciousness states.... Mad, sad, glad scared.
- b. Exercises to find one's center
- c. Step out—Remember—conscious and unconscious
- d. Conscious partnering: splitting
- e. Conscious inclusion: Involving your child in decision making and activities
- f. Exercise to let go of wrong thinking or ruminating
- g. Conscious listening
- h. Exercise in whole consciousness listening
- i. Exercise in developing a reflective compassionate self-observer

List everyday situations mother's or father's have with their children

- a. decision making... who's the boss
- b. battle of the wills.... Child vs adult... Teen vs adult