

Tips from “How to Be a Great Listener”

Learn the Art of Listening to Create Intimate Conversation, Trust and Love

Building love and trust involves really listening to our partners, which is not as easy as it sounds. Asking the right questions, empathizing and making someone feel understood are skills that can dramatically increase intimacy in any relationship.

Step 1: Prepare yourself – shift the focus away from yourself. It’s about being genuinely being interested in your partner. In other words, tune into their world

Step 2: Attune – It’s your job as a listener to be “present” with your partner. Listen to their feelings and don’t minimize them. Be careful not take responsibility for their feelings nor try to cheer them up. Just tune in to how they are feeling. Your goal is to understand.

Step 3: Reflect back what you hear: Listening is witnessing – meaning you listen so your partner won’t be alone. Repeat in your own words what you hear and then communicate validation. This is not the time to offer suggestions, advice or problem solve.

Sample Questions in Seeking to Understand:

1. What are your concerns?
2. What are you feeling? (this can help your partner use the “I” statement)
3. What is making you feel this way?
4. Do you have any mixed feelings about this?
5. What’s happened recently that has made you feel so angry?
6. What do you need?
7. What can I do for you?

Sample Statements of Empathy and Understanding as You Listen

1. I support your position here
2. You must be feeling so trapped
3. I wish you didn’t have to go through that
4. No wonder you’re upset
5. That’s a great point.
6. You seem like you’re in a lot of pain about this
7. Okay, I think I get it. So what you’re feeling is....

Sample Statements to Explore Feelings and Needs as You Listen

1. Tell me more of that
2. We have lots of time to talk. This is important
3. Tell me what you’re most concerned about
4. Talk to me more about what the decision is that you think you have to make
5. Do you have choices you’ve given some thought to?
6. It sounds like you’ve come up with some solutions. Is that right?
7. Tell me more of what you need right now

"The Four Horsemen and the Antidotes"

The barriers that prevent us from moving towards forgiveness and reconciliation has been succinctly identified as the "4 Horsemen" by John Gottman and Nan Silver in *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.

The 4 horsemen lead to toxic outcomes in any relationship. Couples can avoid the 4 horseman by employing the antidotes to further build a solid relationship built on grace, forgiveness and compassion.

1st Horseman – Criticism: Involves bringing up an issue in a way that focuses on your partner's character or personality flaws rather than on what you would like them to do differently. It implies they are somehow defective or inadequate.

Antidote: Soft start up and ask for specific behavior change:

- Effective use of "I" Statements
- Ask if this is a good time to talk
- Express appreciations

2nd Horseman – Defensiveness: an attempt to protect yourself, to defend your innocence or to ward off any attacks. This is a common response when someone is feeling criticized. It's actually a way of blaming your partner for the problem. "The reason I'm defensive is because you" Defensiveness escalates the problem.

Antidote: Take responsibility:

- You're right, I'm sorry for...
- What else can I do to make this right?

3rd Horseman – Contempt: in partnership with criticism, contempt is the tone and physical expression of a negative mind in which you look for and express your partner's mistakes. Sarcasm, cynicism, eye-rolling, demeaning tone of voice, mockery and hostile humor. *This is considered the most dangerous of the 4 Horsemen.*

Antidote: Describe your feelings and needs: build a culture of appreciation

- Effective use of "I" statements
- Express appreciation
- Be self-aware of body language and tone of voice

4th Horseman – Stonewalling: occurs when you withdraw from the interaction while the person is physically present. Essentially, this mean not giving cues that you're really listening or paying attention. Most often demonstrated by avoiding eye contact, disengagement and crossing your arms. Withdrawing and turning away from your partner perpetuates a negative spiral in the relationship making the issue unresolved.

Antidote: Self-soothing break: Then re-connect:

- Take a time out to avoid escalation – it is recommended that you take at least 20 minutes
- Avoid using that time to focus on negative thinking – PRAY – for yourself and your partner
- Agree on a time to reconnect