

Listening to Understand - Why God gave us two ears and only one mouth

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Recently, I was reading a book about the bones in our body with my granddaughter. I was reminded that the smallest bones in our bodies are in our ears. There are three small but extremely important bones in our middle ear--the hammer, the anvil, and the stirrup. These bones transmit sound vibrations from the air to the fluid in the inner ear, fulfilling their role in helping us to hear.

I remember hearing as a child that God gave us two ears and only one mouth because we are to listen more than we speak. Taking it a step further, Stephen Covey has said that the biggest communication problem we have is that we do not listen to understand, we listen to reply or

respond. When we are just waiting for our turn to share our opinion or argue our point of view, we are not listening to really see, understand, and accept the other person.

Having a conversation is meant to be a shared exchange. In fact, the "con" in conversation means "with." When I am speaking and listening to my spouse, child, or a friend, I am engaging with them. To do this involves paying attention and being present. I cannot be looking at something on my phone or laptop or reading a book or magazine.

Listening to understand means I must not only hear the words but also see the non-verbal (body language) and try to sense the emotions that are behind the words. When we shift to listening to understand, this is where compassion, love and empathy become a part of the conversation and when connection truly happens.

Did you know that research shows that we typically remember only about 25% of what we hear? Using the acronym **HLUA**, here are some tips to support us to become better listeners.

- **Hear:** Physically take in the sound. This means that we need to stay focused on the person speaking instead of looking at our phone or tuning them out because we think we know what they're going to say.
- **Listen:** This is a step up from hearing; it means that we bring empathy into the picture and really try to listen to what the other person is saying, all the while considering their perspective. Don't forget to pay attention to their body language and tone of voice too: they account for 93% of communication!
- **Understand:** After we've heard someone and listened to them, we need to confirm our understanding of what was said with the other person. Why? Because it's easy to misinterpret something

based on our own assumptions or a mistaken understanding of someone else's map. By confirming what was said with the other person, we not only demonstrate to them that we're listening, which is hugely honoring, it also helps us avoid responding based on a mistaken belief.

- **Acknowledge:** Let the other person know that we're present and that we're paying attention. This can be as simple as nodding or saying, "uh huh" or "go on." It's all about showing the other person that we care so we can build rapport and keep the conversation going.

Here are some games/activities that you can do as a family to enhance each of your listening skills:

- Pick a topic and divide into pairs. Have one person be the listener and the other person shares for 3-5 minutes or less. (With younger children, start with a shorter amount of time.) Come back together as a whole family and have the listener share what their partner told them, seeing how much they can remember. Do a second round switching roles within the pairs.
- Play the game, "I'm going on a trip and I am taking..." One person begins saying the statement and adding an item that begins with A. The next person says the whole sentences including the A item and adds an item that begins with B. Continue around the family circle repeating the whole sentence and adding a new item that begins with the next letter.
- Break into pairs and provide one blindfold for each pair. One person puts on the blindfold and the other person guides them through the house or backyard by giving clear verbal directions. Remind everyone before starting that goal is for everyone to be safe (not get hurt) and to communicate clearly.

For more on creating connection in our relationships (the space between),

checking these blogs:

www.coachmyrna.org/blog/the-power-of-connection

www.coachmyrna.org/blog/steps-to-cultivating-family-communication-and-connection-the-space-between

To purchase my book on Amazon, click here:
tinyurl.com/7-Gifts-to-Give-Your-Child

If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: www.coachmyrna.org/ Find out more about Safe Conversations www.coachmyrna.org/safe-conversations.html.

