



Be a Listener

Seems like everybody has an opinion and wants to tell you what they think. But, I think we need to slow down, pause and consider being a supportive listener to those we are encountering. People are looking for someone who is genuine, authentic and actually cares about what they are going through. As the world spins negatively, we have the opportunity to be people of respect and hope.

Part of the reason there are so many mental health problems in our communities, is that there is a lack of connection with those around us. There are many causes of this disconnect. I believe we need to reset our mind and heart towards one of availability, to those in need. Those in need are likely those we care the most about anyway. They are direct family members, relatives, neighbors, colleagues as well as those we happen to connect with in our daily lives.

I suggest refreshing your awareness skills and read about 'active listening'. I'm sure many have heard about 'active listening'. The goal is to not just parrot back what you hear. Instead the goal is to connect with the underlying heartfelt experience in the speaker. The person speaking to you will give you feedback as to whether you heard them correctly and accurately.

Often we can hear something different than what is being said or we are waiting for the moment when we can say our reaction to the topic being discussed. Instead maybe pause, connect eye to eye, hear the heart and feelings as well as the words spoken. This will lead to a feeling of relaxation for the speaker and the listener. It will ground us and connect us better with each other.

Our culture, especially with technology distractions and addictions, has accepted minimal attention spans, instant stimulation episodes which have led to severely disconnected relationships and lifestyles. This is especially true for youth and young adults. A likely result of this is increased depression, loneliness, isolation and anxiety.

Reestablishing natural human connections will reduce these negative symptoms that are present today in our communities.

Aim to be a better listener. A young adult woman once told me, that she liked coming to counseling because it was like 'rent a friend'. I have often told that story and laughed. But, actually it's very tragic that we don't have safe family and friends to talk to and connect with and receive caring support from. I understand there is a place for serious mental health care. But, also there is a strong need for caring family and friends who will listen genuinely and confidentially.

Don't let society or technology or the world cause a disruption or disconnect in the relationships you care the most about. Make the commitment to be a stable source of support in your personal life. Let your heart feel and breath as you actively listen and connect with others, even if they are a stranger.

For parents, I suggest checking in with your kids, teens and young adults about how they are doing. Stop yourself from reacting and telling them what to do. Just be a listener and allow them to hear their thoughts, feelings and sort their way through their struggles and challenges. It will mean a lot for them to know that your door is always open, if they need to talk.

May your relationships grow in depth, understanding and love!

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