

Listening For Impact - Exercise

Applications

This exercise will offer a way of listening that will have impact for both the listener and the speaker.

It will help the speaker feel understood and heard and the listener will feel touched and connected to the person who is talking.

Background

Many people feel that they are good listeners, but often they are not as good as they'd like to think.

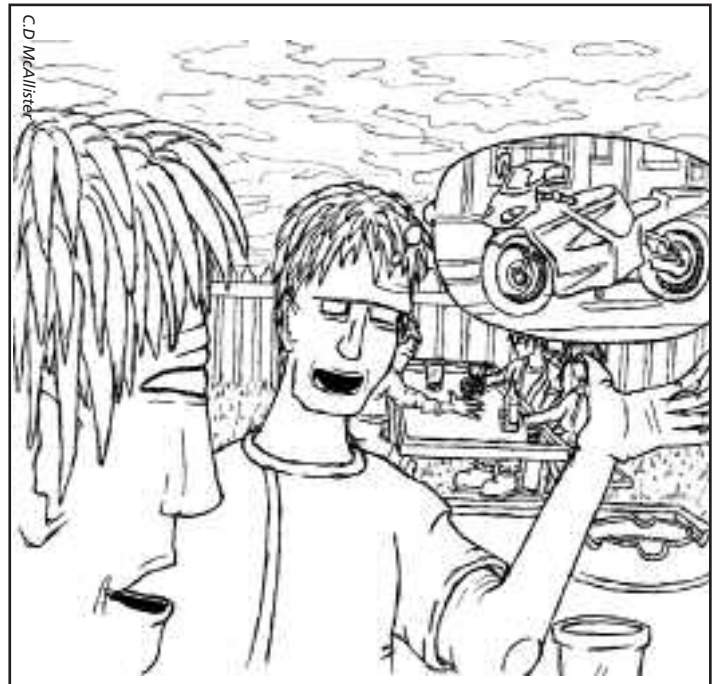
Often, good listening is judged on the amount of facts you can recall about what was said. But when working in the area of health and well-being, there is a therapeutic reason for listening, as opposed to making an assessment, where facts are important. What is of greatest value is that the person feels heard and understood.

Language is only one of the tools we have to communicate meaning, but often words do not adequately convey the message. Unfortunately, people often focus on the words people choose and miss the point they are trying to make.

By listening to the meaning behind a person's words, you are more readily able to hear the deeper meaning that the person is trying to convey. People tell stories through conveying facts and examples, but what they are trying to do is share the feeling behind these events. Often people speak and share stories to seek some type of emotional understanding or support.

If the feeling behind the story is not recognised or acknowledged, then the person doesn't feel heard.

With this type of listening, you are not listening for details, you



are listening for impact.

In listening for impact, you judge your ability to listen not on how many facts you can recall, but how touched you are by the person's story. If you are touched, you pick up on the feeling behind the person's words and you achieve a meeting of minds where you can actually see what it is the person is trying to convey to you.

This is not to be confused with sympathy. Sympathy is where you hear something sad in the person's story and relate it to something sad in your life and end up feeling sad yourself. In this situation, you're not getting affected by the other person, but by your own memories.

In listening for impact you are listening for the spirit behind the person's story.

Example

You may be listening to your child talking about all the things he did at school today, how he painted a

picture for his teacher and the teacher was so pleased he took it to the headmaster who then shared it in assembly, giving him a 'head teachers award' in front of the whole school.

If you were listening for details you could recall the name of his teacher and what the picture was of, when he drew it and why the head teacher was given it etc. But if you were listening for impact, you would have heard the enthusiasm and pride your son was feeling. The details didn't matter so much. Your son wanted to share this great feeling with you and have it acknowledged. When you get used to this type of listening, you will find it useful in many contexts; with a client who wants you to understand how things look for them, a partner who complains you don't understand, to hearing why it is your boss is being hard on you.

Listening for impact was influenced by the work of George Pransky.

Exercise

1. Next time you have the opportunity to listen to someone in conversation, try to listen in this new way, listen for impact.
2. Start by relaxing into the role of listener, remember not to try to keep up on all the details, but to connect to the feeling the person is communicating. If you listen correctly, the words won't matter.
3. When you pick up on the feeling the person is communicating, acknowledge it with them. (See example below)
4. If you can't feel it, it's probably because they don't know what they feel and perhaps the conversation was a means of trying to work this out. In this situation, be curious and ask. For example, "what stood out about...?" or "what did that leave you with..?"
5. Once the feeling has been acknowledged and identified, you can help the person identify what, if anything, they want to do about it.
6. In conclusion, reflect on the conversation - were you touched? Were they heard? Did anything new happen?

Teaching points

- Listening and communicating are the foundations of healthy relationships.
- In healthy relationships it's not necessarily what you 'do' when you're together, but the feeling that is created in each other's company.
- Listening for impact can be beneficial in developing true person-centred planning, as the person's true intent can become the focus of support.
- If you (as a listener) are touched, then you have truly 'heard' the message.
- If the speaker feels a connection to you, then they are being 'heard' regularly.

Example

A young woman was talking about her situation at work. She described how she had changed the filing system to a more efficient system and had done this over and above her ordinary role. She also went on to describe how she had noticed various other systems and procedures she could improve on and how she'd got on and done this. She spent time complaining that people at work seemed to be happy to use such ineffective systems when, with a little effort, these could be improved and make work easier for them all. She went on to describe many more details and examples of how this seemed common in her office. The feeling that I picked up was that she felt **frustrated** and **confused**.

Me "Sounds frustrating"

Pat "You have no idea!..."

Me "But you seem confused too?"

Pat "Yeah, funny you should mention that, I do feel confused. I don't understand why they can't see my logic, how they can work in such an environment?"

Me "What do you make of that?"

Pat "Well, this is the confusing thing. I think they must be really ignorant or something, but I know they're not. There must be something else to it"

Me "What do you think they'd have to say about it?"

Pat "Well I know that! They tell me all the time that it just doesn't bother them, it doesn't matter to them"

Me "But it matters to you?"

Pat "Well yes, I hadn't realised how much! I wish things didn't bug me so much, it's like I can't get things out of my head that irritate me. Maybe they're just more chilled than me?"

Me "Would you like to be more 'chilled' like them?"

Pat "Hell yes! Hey, maybe they could teach me something!"