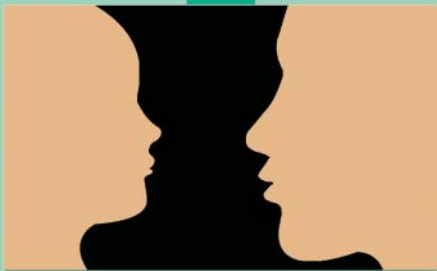


**Take
a
moment
to
listen**



Listening to Children

Listening to Children

Take a Moment to Listen

Dr. Denis Waitley

Take a moment to listen
To what your children are trying to say;
Listen today, whatever you do
Or they won't be there to listen to you.
Listen to their problems. Listen for their
needs,
Praise their smallest triumphs, praise their
smallest deeds;
Tolerate their chatter, amplify their laughter.
Find out what's the matter; find out what
they're after.
But tell them that you love them, every
single night;
And though you scold them, be sure you
hold them;
Tell them "Everything's all right; tomorrow's
looking bright."
Take a moment to listen today.
To what your children are trying to say;
Listen today, whatever you do.
And they will come back to listen to you!!

Some Facts to Remember

Listening is a part of the Child's Right to Participation that is one of the four groups of child rights covered by the UN-CRC¹ announced in 1989.

We need to remember that, **'listening to children' is not only important, it is their right to be heard.**

Can we work/interact with anybody if we are not ready to listen to them? People generally prefer to talk more and listen less. However, when we talk, we do expect others to listen, so why don't we listen to others when they want to say something to us? Listening to children is emphasized more because we, the adults, are in authoritarian position and so we feel tempted to tell children what to do rather than listen to them.

In the fast moving world, parents do not find enough time to spend with their children. Hence, parents' interactions with children are more often related to either school i.e. homework, exams, tuitions, materials that have to be taken to the school or personal

routines i.e. eat this, wear this, get up, time to go to school and similar things.

Some favourite words of children are –

Why? How? What? and Why not?

which demonstrate their innate curiosity and keen interest to understand relationships and behaviour.

Some favourite words of adults are –

Don't, No, Stop, Keep quiet,

Don't argue etc., which signify that they are the authority and know what is best for children.

Why Adults Do Not Listen to Children?

Adults generally do not listen to children because...

- Listening is not a regular practice; even adult - adult listening is not very common.
- Listening is not considered important as much as speaking skills. For example, there are awards for speaking skills but there are hardly any awards for listening skills.

- Listening is hard to do. It is more than hearing sounds.
- Listening means thinking about the things you hear and requires time and the attitude.
- Speaking allows us to control and direct where as listening puts us at the receiving end.
- Adults feel that only experience can teach and hence they have nothing to learn from children as children lack experience.



What Does Listening to a Child Involve?

Listening to a Child Involves

- Giving your full attention i.e. face her/him. Sit with her/him and have eye contact with her/him
- Understanding your child's tone and body language

Give them Full Attention

- Allowing your child to lead the way instead of giving your verdict.
- Being open to and respecting child's views.

Why is Listening Important to Children?

Listening to children enables them to

- put forward their thoughts and feelings.
- develop positive self concept
- enhance children's competence and self confidence
- help children to accept other's point of view
- help children to develop trust in adults.
- develop and sharpen their skills in negotiation and communication.
- establish healthy relationship with adults and peers.

Why is Listening Important to Adults?

Listening to children

- helps adults to empathise with children
- helps them in understanding children's unique thoughts, feelings, hopes, fears and joy
- helps create child-focused culture.

*H*ow to Inculcate the Habit of Listening?

We can organise various activities in schools and introduce certain practices in the family to inculcate the habit of listening. In the school, make it a practice to observe silence for a few minutes every day. Tell children to listen to the sounds around. Sometimes they may be asked to listen to their inner voice. At the end of the few minutes of silence, let children share the sounds, which they heard from the environment or their inner voice. The teacher should also share her/his experiences. The practice of maintaining silence could be followed in the family too.

A game could be played to emphasize the importance of listening carefully to others. Children sit in a circle. One child whispers a word/sentence to the next child who repeats it to the next child and so on—until such time that the last child repeats what s/he heard to the first child. Generally the original word/sentence changes completely by the time it is passed on from child to child. This game can be used to illustrate how careful or careless we are while listening to others and what could be the disadvantages of careless listening.

In the family, during meal times or in the classroom situations, make it a practice not to talk simultaneously but to talk one at a

time and to give a patient hearing to whoever is speaking.

Another activity could be to listen to the songs, dialogues, news on radio or TV and try to reproduce them.

Listening and Responding to Children Positively

When adults listen to children, they also respond to what the child has to tell. Let us see how adults can relate to children in a positive manner in home setting and in school setting:

Relating positively in home setting

Child: I hate school

Father: What do you hate about it the most?

Instead of straight away telling a child that she is wrong, ask a specific question for initiating a meaningful discussion.

Child: I lost my red pencil

Mother: Oh!

Child: It was on my desk when I went to the toilet.

Mother: I see!

Child: Maybe I should have kept it inside the desk before going to the toilet.

The teacher should take this opportunity to discuss the danger of jumping into a pond or for a young child to drown in a bucket full of water as well as talking about the ill effects of coloured water on the skin while playing holi.

Such interaction would not only add to the children's practical knowledge, it would also strengthen the bond between the teacher and the child. If the teacher had ignored the child's comment, the children may have found the story monotonous and would have missed learning from each other's experience.

2. While teaching about the circulatory system to children the teacher mentions about blood donation.

Child A: When you donate blood, doesn't the quantity of blood decrease in your body resulting in weakness?

Teacher: No, our body has the mechanism by which we can replace the lost blood within a day or so.

Child B: My father has donated blood 50 times.

Teacher: Good. Let us invite B's father to tell us more about blood donation.

Instead of negative verbiage such as “If you can’t care for your things you are bound to lose them.” etc, acknowledging your child’s feelings helps her to find her own solutions.



Child: I want a ripe banana

Mother: There is no ripe banana at home

Child: But I want a ripe banana only.

Mother: I wish I had a magic wand to make the banana ripe for you in a minute!

Instead of explanation and logic, give a child her wishes in fantasy.

4. The Child is about to leave home for school and forgets to take her lunch.

Mother: ‘Rani, Your lunch.’

Instead of lecturing and saying

“You are again forgetting your lunch, do you have a brain up there?”

saying it in one word prevents negative vibes and conveys the message positively.



Relating positively in school setting:

1. A teacher is telling a story where the fox jumps in the tub of coloured water and becomes blue. One child asks: Didi, while playing holi (a festival of colours celebrated in India), my sister entered the pond of coloured water and her skin became red.

In this example, by encouraging children to ask questions and by responding to their doubts, the teacher manages to give extra information to children, that may not have been given in the textbook.

Learning thus becomes interesting as it becomes a dialogue between children and teacher instead of a monologue by the teacher. Besides, children's curiosity to know more is satisfied.



Gender and Cultural Differences in Listening to Children

- India being a patriarchal society, boys are given special attention and treatment as compared to girls. Hence, parents tend to lend their ear more easily to boys as they are considered future heads of the families.
- On the other hand, girls are more attuned to listening to various people because of the multiple tasks they are expected to perform at and outside home. Rarely do they get chance to voice their needs, let alone their views and opinions.
- In the cultural context, a child in the male dominated family may not get an opportunity to express her/himself as compared to a child in a culture where women have equal opportunities as men to express themselves.
- Child participation and listening to children need attitudinal change. It is important for the parents to recognise that when they listen to children, they gain important insight into the reality of children's lives.
- The continuous dialogue between adults and children results in mutual respect.
- If parents and other adults begin to treat children as partners in the process of problem solving and decision making, the gender difference may be minimised.

Listening towards Effective

Communication

Listening and responding are important components of meaningful and positive communication between any two individuals, more so between adults and children.

Listening is a sure tool for a positive relationship between adults and children.

Positive communication helps in solving the problem as evident from the following example:

Mother: I think it is not easy for you to leave your friends when you are having fun but on the other hand, I worry when you are late.

Let us put our heads together and see if we can come up with some ideas that would be good for both of us.

Both of them make a list of ideas for coming early.

Mother & Child sit together,

Mother : Now let us look at our list and see what we want to cross out and what we want to keep.

Both of them jointly do the exercise.

Mother (at the end of the exercise):

Well, let us see what we have decided so far. I'll delay dinner by 15 minutes. That will give you fifteen extra minutes to play. We will add to your savings to get your watch repaired. This will enable you to know what the time is. How do you find these arrangements?

Child: Good!

This illustration explains that joint decisions are mutually acceptable.

Note: The dialogues quoted in this brochure under the sub-headings Relating Positively in Home Setting and Listening towards Effective Communication have been taken or adapted from the following book: Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk*. Avon Books, New York, 1982.

(Footnotes)¹

United Nations-Convention on the Rights of the Child



Listening Empowers !

About CHETNA

CHETNA¹, meaning “awareness” in several Indian languages and an acronym for Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness is a non-government support organisation based in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. CHETNA’s mission is to contribute to the empowerment of disadvantaged children, adolescents and women to gain control over their own, their families’ and communities’ health. Beginning its activities in 1980, CHETNA has broadened its activities in the field of nutrition, health, education and development from a “Rights” perspective.

CHETNA builds the management capacities of education/health practitioners/supervisors/managers with a view to enable them to implement their field programmes from a holistic and gender perspective and advocate for people centered policies.

CHETNA develops need-based training and education materials, which are widely disseminated at the state, national and international levels.

An Information and Documentation Centre (IDC) addresses the information needs of individuals, organisations, academicians, reserachers and students working on health, education and development concerns.

CHETNA has been identified as a Regional Resource Centre (RRC) for Gujarat State and the Union Territories of Daman, Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli to provide technical assistance to NGOs to improve RCH, facilitate GO-NGO partnership, document and disseminate successful approaches and provide inputs to GOI to ensure effective implementation of policies.



For Children Young People Women

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