

Nancy Ruben, MFT

A Los Angeles Psychotherapist: Individual, Couple, Child and Family Therapy

Repairing Your Relationships

Communication is key to repairing relationships. Listening fully to the other person is the most important part of communication -- **really listening**, without the internal dialogue or ideas of what you'll say next in your head. In therapy with families and couples, I often ask one person to sit back and listen like a good friend while I interview the other. I ask the listening person to be curious -- not assume they know what the other will say -- and assure them that they'll have their time to reflect and be interviewed also.

In a therapy session with a mother and her daughter, the daughter was upset, feeling that her mother did not believe her. A rich conversation emerged about the daughter's new intentions and behavior that the mother knew nothing of. The daughter had decided, for many reasons she named and stood behind, that she no longer wanted to lie and actually had stopped awhile back. The mother knew nothing of these changes or her daughter's desire for a relationship of trust and telling the truth. Listening without judgment was the key to this new mother-daughter communication.

More Ideas:

- Create an atmosphere of care and support by validating the other person's reality or point of view (really listening to the other supports this)
- Let go of your bag of old grievances. If you have a long history, with a heavy load of pain, consider using a ritual to help release them.
- Avoid labeling, dumping, mind-reading and generalizing – it might make you feel better temporarily, but it takes a toll on your relationships.
- Avoid stories and generalizing about the other.
- Re-invigorate your communication by being crystal clear, specific and detailed in your requests for change. Focus on actions, words, facial expressions, gestures, voice tones and volumes like a DVD
- Do something different! There are times, when it is time to stop talking and start acting.

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Repairing Your Relationships (cont)

- Stay in the present or recent history and focus on actions, not **personal traits**.
- Avoid stories. Re-invigorate your communication by making your action request clear and specific
- Negotiate, compromise or, if necessary, shelve a disagreement for a specified time
- Catch the other (your partner, child, etc) doing something right – let them know quickly and specifically what you are noticing and appreciating!
- Write a letter to the other person, telling them about a time you felt close to them or loved. Include **specific descriptions of what he or she did!**
- Change one of your long-established relational patterns.....and see what happens

REMEMBER: There are no lists or standard requirements of what makes a good wife, husband, partner, child or friend—you and the other person get to invent your own list and teach each other what works!

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