Listening Strategies

Why is listening important?

Listening is the one of the most effective, efficient strategies available to you. It has such a powerful effect on behavior that it can supersede your need to use any other strategy.

Listening communicates two main goals:

1. **Saying what you see** communicates:
   "I see you. You are not invisible to me."

2. **Asking open questions** communicates:
   "I'm curious about you. I want to be changed by you."

Say What You See	Ask Questions
Use perception words: • "It looks like..." • "It seems like..." • "It sounds like..." **Play back what you hear:** • **Repeat**: "First you got stuck in the rain, and then you got splashed by a bus." • **Summarize**: "Wow—you had a bad day!" • **Clarify**: Make sure you accurately heard what was said and understand the underlying meaning.	**Look out for "fake" questions!** **Fake question:** "Did you have a great time at the party?" **Open questions:** • "How are you doing?" • "How was your day?" • "What do you think of this?" • "How are you feeling?"

For more information, contact Pippi Kessler at pippikessler@gmail.com

Guesses vs. Wiggle Room

Some phrases have hidden, embedded "guesses" about the other person or shut down possibility about what their answer might be. Swap out limiting phrases with phrases that leave room for variation.

Guesses	Wiggle Room
"What do your mom and dad do?" "Everybody..." "Nobody..." "Girls..." "Always..." "Never..." "All..."	"What was it like for you growing up?" "Some people..." "I..." "Sometimes..." "Often..." "Some..."

Non-verbal Strategies:

- "Mmm hmmm..."
- Nodding
- Smiling
- Open your body (uncross your arms, etc)
- Inhale
- Orient your body toward the other person
- Stop other activities

Mirroring:

- Adjust your vocal tone and body language to mirror the person you're listening to.
- Play their body language back to them.
- Be careful to do this without mocking them.

If you're having trouble listening:

What's difficult for you: "seeing" or being curious?
If you're having trouble playing back what you're hearing or making observations, you're having trouble "seeing."

If seeing is hard for you:
Ask: What's competing for your attention? You might need to satisfy that need before you're able to listen.

Ask: Is there something that makes "seeing" hard for me? If so, what will help me practice?

If you're having a hard time being curious:
Ask: What's going on for you? What are the reasons someone might not be curious about someone else? Do you need some care right now? Are you feeling mistrustful of others or disappointed? Is something depressing you or making you want to retreat?

Brainstorm: Take a few minutes to jot down for yourself—are there any parts of listening that you imagine might be difficult for you to put into practice? What do you think you would need to make it easier for you?

Why does Listening Work?

Listening is efficient. Communicating "I see you/I'm curious" is one of the most efficient ways to achieve a higher goal: Communicating to another person that you value them. You could build a statue of someone, but it would take longer. By listening, you're saying, "I want you to disrupt my senses – that's how valuable I think you are."

Listening *is* within your power. Being a witness to someone else's life is one of the most powerful, free gifts that you can offer another person. We can't save one another, and we can't take on one another's sadness or happiness, but we can do this.

Listening speaks to our deepest human needs. One of our deepest needs is to be seen, valued, and unconditionally cared for. That's what listening communicates.

Listening can decode negative behaviors. Sometimes, people seek to meet their underlying need for unconditional caring by acting destructively. By listening, you'll get a better sense of what the true issues are.

Getting better at listening is worth it. Listening might seem simple, but if I could only pick one strategy in my brain to save, I'd pick listening skills—**that's how effective this is.**

Listen up, Y'all!