



Communication and Listening Skills

A famous psychologist, Carl Rogers, once hypothesized that genuineness, non-possessive love (caring) and empathy were three necessary qualities for constructive communication. In the past twenty years, research findings have strongly supported this theory. Patients improve faster when their doctors have these qualities, clients make more gains when their therapists demonstrate these qualities, and students achieve more when their teachers share these qualities. In your communication with your Resource Daughter, remember that these qualities are the essential ingredients for fostering growth and health in another.

Genuineness: the fullest expression of who you really are.

Caring: your concern for the well-being of the other and your acceptance of who she is.

Empathy: The understanding you have from “walking a mile in another person’s shoes.”

The following are some general guidelines for communication in an effective manner:

- ★ Use language that is understandable to your Resource Daughter. Check to make sure she is familiar with the vocabulary you are using, particularly words related to her diet and maternal PKU.
- ★ Speak slowly and concisely. Use short simple sentences, especially when conveying important information.
- ★ Make sure the Resource Daughter has time to respond. Listen carefully to what she says and check with her to make sure you understand her.
- ★ Speak about your own feelings and encourage the other person to do so.

The following are some specific guidelines for communicating well.

- ★ Respond to the most important message that may be imbedded in a long story.
- ★ Respond to the other person’s behavior as well as her words.
- ★ Encourage the Resource Daughter to respond to your perceptions.
- ★ If the Resource Daughter tends to keep talking without allowing for responses, break in with “I feel confused” so the main message can be identified.

Listening

Listening is as important as responding. Listening conveys acceptance and warmth. It encourages the Resource Daughter to express her thoughts and emotions in a safe environment. This empowers her to explore solutions to problems without fear of making a mistake.

Phrases and Questions for Good Listening

Paraphrasing:

1. Do I understand you to mean...?
2. What I hear you saying is.....
3. Let me tell you what I am understanding
4. Is what you are really saying is...

Clarification:

1. What do you mean by the word...?
2. I don't understand quite what you mean. Can you try explaining that again?
3. I hear what you are saying, but your expression seems to be saying something else.
4. How do you know that it true?
5. Is this a good example of what you are saying
6. I've also had that same experience. Like you, I felt... is that right?

Positive Feedback

1. I understand what you are saying.
2. Thank you for sharing that with me. I know it's hard to talk about this.
3. No, I don't feel that way, but why don't you tell me why you do.
4. I see. Uh, huh...

Barriers to Communication

Listening requires us to, first, really want to know the other person and, second, avoid the many common barriers to careful listening, such as:

1. comparing yourself to the speaker (Who is smarter? Who's had it rougher?)
2. trying to mind read what the talker really thinks
3. planning what argument or story to give next
4. filtering so that one hears only certain topics or doesn't hear critical remarks
5. judging a statement to be "crazy," "boring," "stupid," "immature," "hostile," etc. before it is completed
6. going off on one's own daydreams
7. remembering your own personal experiences instead of listening to the talker,
8. drafting your prescription or advice long before the talker has finished telling his/her woes
9. changing the topic or laughing it off if the topic gets serious
10. placating the other person ("You're right...Of course...I agree...Really!") by automatically agreeing with everything

Listening Exercise-Speaker/Listener Pairs

Background:

Think about losses that you have experienced in the last year noting that each loss involves many smaller losses, and that loss is a part of any experience of change, even changes for the better. For example, you may have lost someone to socialize with, to call, or to eat out with. Perhaps a relationship ended, a job ended, a pet died, or your daughter started school or college.

Exercise:

A. In pairs, the Speaker recalls a loss and tells what it was like to lose whatever they had. The Listener is to find out what it was like for the Speaker to lose something, but the Listener must follow these rules:

1. No advice or suggestions
2. No pointing out the positive side of things
3. No sharing of your own relevant personal experiences
4. No analysis nor insight-giving
5. No fixing it up. Just learn what it was like.

B. Share for 3-4 minutes then have a 2-3 minute feedback.

Speaker will go first: What was it like for you to tell someone else about the loss you experienced? If the Listener did any of the 5 things above, point out non-judgementally where. Then, Listener: What was it like for you to learn about someone else's loss without giving advice nor making suggestions nor pointing out the positive side not sharing your own relevant experiences nor giving insights nor analyzing?

C. Then change roles and exchange feedback again. What did you learn in either role?

D. In the larger group, pool what people learned from this exercise in either role. How hard it is to feel helpless without trying to do something to relieve that feeling? How easy is it to talk about the loss, how without interruptions one is able to learn more about oneself.