

## **Counseling Corner**

### **Learn To Listen Better And You'll Hear Relationships Improve**

from the American Counseling Association

Ever wonder why your friends are your friends? While many factors foster friendship, one of the most important is having good communication. It sounds simple, but often it isn't.

The problem is that most of us are much better at talking than we are at listening. Communication, especially among friends, doesn't simply mean talking, but also learning to really listen to what he or she has to say. We all can learn to develop or improve good listening skills, and doing so is important if we want our relationships to prosper.

A starting point is to observe what others do in a conversation. Try listing the things a good listener does that let you know that person has been paying attention and really hearing what you had to say. Then do a second list of what someone does that shows he or she hasn't really been listening to you and wasn't very interested.

Next, monitor your own actions when someone is sharing something important with you. Would you call yourself a good or poor listener?

There are some simple guidelines that can help make you a more effective listener. First is simply to listen more than you talk. Constantly interrupting with your own stories shows you aren't really listening and that you value your own experiences more than what the other person is sharing.

Good listeners will often repeat key points to show they've been paying attention and understood what was being said. They'll also allow for corrections if they have misunderstood something. And a good listener will ask questions when something is said that wasn't understood. An effective way to end a conversation, especially when something important has been communicated, is to summarize what you've heard to show you've understood it all correctly.

Good listening also requires more than just paying attention. You don't want to respond in a way that minimizes or seems critical of what was just shared. Be clear if what is being shared is confidential or outside your personal limits. In such cases, restate that you will keep the confidence, or ask to stop the conversation if it is making you uncomfortable.

Communication is vital to a good friendship, but it's important to remember that means both listening and talking. Become a good listener and you'll find that relationships with your friends, spouse and your children will all grow stronger.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association.  
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