



How Listening Can Improve Your Love Life ***Important Do's and Don'ts You Need To Know!***

Whether you are married or single, listening may be the greatest contribution you can bring to your relationships. Listening strengthens relationships and demonstrates attentiveness, caring and respect. Listening is more than just hearing, however. To truly listen, you must give your undivided attention and put your own agenda and needs aside.

For many women, being able to speak without interruption is like a release. Think of it like carrying around a bucket all day, collecting different thoughts and emotions. At some point they must be poured out and shared with a trusted friend. Further, allowing a hurting woman to share can be like releasing steam from a pressure cooker. The expression is as crucial to the healing as finding a solution to the hurt.

Good listening is an active process. For some it comes naturally, but many have to learn and practice the valuable skill of thoughtful listening. Below are some suggested Do's and Don'ts to consider.

Do Not

- **Assume**
When you are listening, suspend assumptions. Assuming involves having preconceived conclusions about the topic being shared. Confirm your understanding before jumping to conclusions. Making unconfirmed assumptions can be like a train that has gotten off the track, and the Conductor may not even be aware of it.
- **Interrupt**
Oftentimes, we are so consumed with our own thoughts; we can't wait to jump in to speak. Interrupting someone is a frequent mistake couples make, especially if they have known each other for some time. This devalues their ideas and disrespects their opinions.
- **Advise**
Unless asked, you should not immediately try to fix the problem or advise the other person on what they should do. Listening is not your opportunity to diagnose and prescribe – leave that to the professionals. Analyzing your spouse without being invited to will quickly halt your communication and your love life.
- **Compete**
An example of competing is inserting your experience into the other person's. "You should hear what happened to me," or "I had the same experience but even worse!" are not helpful responses when someone is trying to unburden themselves. Some may feel that sharing a related story is proof you were listening, but instead, it may appear that you are trying to steal the show. Not to mention expressing you have little interest in them.
- **Discount**

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An example of discounting might be saying, “Don’t worry. It’s no big deal. Cheer up.” Do not discount or dismiss other’s emotions. Try to appreciate the perspective, even if you don’t agree with it.

- **Force**

Do not force your agenda, put it aside for now. Listen for understanding, not agreement. Your turn to present your ideas will come later. But while listening, clear your mind and give the gift of your attention.

Do:

- **Concentrate**

When someone is speaking, look at him or her, and transition your thoughts in that direction. Remove the distractions- put down your book, stop your activity, or turn from the TV.

- **Ask Questions**

It is OK to ask what the other person needs from you while they are talking especially if you are asking how you can be most helpful. (Does the other person just want to vent, to be understood, or do they need ideas?)

- **Show Interest**

Even if you have no personal interest in hearing about your husband’s new John Deere riding lawn mover, it is kind to express some interest. Ask, “What are the new features?” or “How big is the engine?”

- **Empathize**

Listen from your heart. Showing empathy is recognizing and appreciating the situation. Saying, “I can see how that would be frustrating/ very exciting/ a surprise to learn about,” shows you are listening to the emotion behind the words.

- **Be Patient**

Listening is a creative force that teaches patience. Choose to be quiet. Allow the other person to finish their thoughts and their words before jumping in with any feedback.

There are a number of benefits to couples that maintain great listening skills.

- It is a powerful link to connect two different people.
- It shows you value their needs and ideas.
- It motivates the other to speak without being judged.
- It provides the benefit of not having to mind-read.
- It reduces stress – when an individual feels understood, an enormous emotional burden is lifted; stress and defensiveness are reduced; and clarity increases.
- There is comfort and safety in knowing you don’t have to weigh thoughts or measure words when sharing your ideas or experiences.

In our daily conversations, listening can quickly take a back seat to talking. Effective listening is fundamental to good communication. Good communication is vital to a loving relationship. Being able to openly communicate and also feel that you have been heard is significant to the success of a resilient relationship. One of the greatest gifts we can give each other is the gift of our undivided attention – being present. The more we understand about one another, the less we fear, and the more we are open to love.

Contact Centerstone at (615) 460-HELP (4357),

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for information about help and support for you or your family.

About Centerstone

Centerstone (www.centerstone.org), a not-for-profit organization, is the largest behavioral healthcare provider in Tennessee and the ninth largest in the nation. Serving the community for more than fifty years, Centerstone provides a full range of behavioral health and related educational services to individuals of all ages and their families. Centerstone is devoted to research that seeks to identify, treat and eliminate mental illness. Centerstone provides services to more than 50,000 individuals annually. Children, adolescents, adults, seniors, and families all receive help from a multitude of different programs at more than 65 facilities and 140 partnership locations throughout the region. For more information about Centerstone, please call (615) 460-4357 or toll free at (888) 291-4357.

About Susan Gillpatrick, MEd, LPC, CTS

Susan Gillpatrick, Centerstone Crisis Management Specialist, primarily works in the field with clients in critical incident response situations, and in Centerstone's wellness trainings and presentations. She is also responsible for planning and implementing marketing and growth strategies for Centerstone's Crisis Management Strategies.

In recent years, Ms. Gillpatrick worked for the Shelby County Government Victims Assistance Center in Memphis. There, she co-developed a model program for the state of Tennessee entitled, "Homicide Response." Her work in this area received the 2000 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties.

Ms. Gillpatrick is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Trauma Specialist, Certified Workplace Conflict Mediator, and Mental Health Service Provider in the state of Tennessee and a National Certified Counselor. She is also a member the American Counseling Association, the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists, the Tennessee Mental Health Counseling Association, and the Middle Tennessee Employee Assistance Professionals Association. She is a frequent presenter at local and national conferences, and has had numerous articles published. She received her Master of Education degree in Human Development Counseling from Peabody College at Vanderbilt University.

To request Susan Gillpatrick to speak with your group or organization about complete wellness in living, contact her at (615) 460-4445 or susan.gillpatrick@centerstone.org.