

WFWP USA: Love That Listens: Active Listening as an Act of Love

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February is the month of love. When we think about love, we often picture grand gestures or heartfelt words. But some of the most powerful expressions of love are quiet. They show up in moments when we choose to listen - truly listen - before reacting, judging, or assuming.

Many challenges in relationships, whether in the workplace, at home, or within our communities, don't begin with bad intentions. They begin with something much simpler: a lack of information. When we don't fully understand what someone is carrying, it's easy to misread their behavior and respond in ways that unintentionally deepen hurt or misunderstanding.

When Information Changes Everything

Imagine this scene.

A man isn't feeling well and goes to a hospital. The waiting room is crowded, and his head is pounding. As he sits there, trying to endure the noise and discomfort, a small boy runs back and forth across the room. The sound of the boy's footsteps and occasional crying pierces the man's headache. His irritation slowly builds.

Why would a parent let a child run wild in a place like this? He doesn't say anything out loud, but inside, frustration grows. He feels forced to endure something unfair when he already feels miserable.

Then, suddenly, the boy's father approaches him. With a quiet apology, the father explains that the boy's mother passed away just two hours earlier. The child doesn't yet understand what has happened, and his restlessness is an expression of confusion and grief.

In an instant, everything changes.

The man's irritation dissolves. Not because the noise stopped, but because new information entered his heart. What once felt like thoughtlessness now reveals deep pain. Instead of anger, compassion rises. Instead of judgment, there is a desire to help.

This is the power of listening. This is the power of love informed by understanding.

So often, when relationships feel strained, it's not because people don't care. It's because they don't know. One may interpret silence, irritation, or withdrawal as disinterest, when it may actually be exhaustion, fear, or unspoken worry. When we act without enough information, even good intentions can cause harm. Love invites us to pause and ask, What am I missing?

The Practice of "Listening with Love"

Active listening is more than hearing words. It is a posture of humility and presence, and a willingness to receive another person's reality without immediately reshaping it to fit our own.

Here are three simple, but transformative, ways to deepen our "listening muscle":

1. Listen with your whole body.

Eye contact, nodding, leaning in. These signals tell the other person, You matter. I'm here. When people feel genuinely seen, they naturally open up and share more honestly.

2. Listen for what isn't being said.

Sometimes the deepest truths are hidden beneath words. Tone, pauses, facial expressions, and energy can reveal emotions that haven't yet found language. Listening with the heart means paying attention to these quiet signals.

3. Listen until the end. Often the most difficult part!

We often interrupt without realizing it, especially when we feel ready to respond. Yet important information is frequently shared at the very end.

A 2022 review published in Patient Education and Counseling found that clinicians interrupt patients after an average of 18 seconds, even though most people finish explaining their concerns in under 46 seconds. That difference (less than 30 seconds) can contain crucial details and emotional context.

Love sometimes looks like patience. By holding back the urge to interrupt for just a little longer, we create space for understanding to emerge.

This kind of listening is not passive. It is active love.

Honoring Different Values and Life Stories

Each person carries a unique set of values shaped by their upbringing, culture, and life experiences. Differences - especially across generations - can easily create misunderstandings if we assume everyone sees the world the same way we do.

Active listening helps bridge these gaps. When we seek to understand why someone thinks or acts the way they do, empathy replaces frustration. Love grows where curiosity lives.

This month, as we reflect on love, may we remember that one of its most transformative expressions requires no special tools, but only presence.

To listen is to love.

And to love well, we must first seek to understand.

Source: Coyle, A. C., Yen, R. W., and Elwyn, G. (2022). Interrupted opening statements in clinical encounters. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 105(8), 2653 - 2663.