



FAMOUS PEOPLE AND THEIR MENTAL HEALTH



Richard Branson

The British entrepreneur summed up his success with these five words: "Listen more than you talk"

5 Ways to Be a Better Listener — and Why it Matters

Brush up on your listening skills with help from a southeast Michigan psychologist and learn how this contributes to the self-esteem of your kids. *By Stacey Winconek*

We are all distracted. You may be reading this article and pausing to check a phone notification or answer a work email. Or you may have to stop to give your child a snack or change your baby's diaper. As parents, we are being pulled in a hundred different directions all day, not to mention having an attention span of 15 to 20 minutes, which shortens in the evening and with lack of interest in the topic being discussed.

Needless to say, our listening skills are suffering.

When is the last time you sat down without distraction to have a conversation with your child or spouse? If it's been a while, it's time to stop and listen.

Here, Kenneth Hammond, Jr., master's level psychologist with Sollars and Associates, offers advice on being a better listener — and why it matters.

Why listening matters

When your child comes home from school and is eager to tell you about his day, you may not be interested in the topic or you simply may be too busy in the moment to truly listen. But that can have a major impact on the relationship you and your child share, Hammond says, because over time "what happens is that the kids start to disengage."

They realize that mom and dad are cutting them off or asking them to repeat themselves.

"The level of trust definitely decreases because now they can't even trust (their

parents) with having the same excitement or just retaining the information that was said previously," he adds.

Honing your listening skills

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Are you listening?"

"Can you please look at me when I'm talking to you?"

If you've heard any of these statements from a loved one, it's time to tweak your listening skills. Here are five ways to become a better listener.

Schedule time. Too busy in a moment when your child is trying to discuss something? "What I have learned with my couples that I do therapy with and my adolescent teens, it's more beneficial to say, 'I heard what you said. Can we meet back up to discuss this?'" Hammond says.

Be up front that your mind is occupied and tell your child you'll be available at a specific time. When that time rolls around, give your child your undivided attention.

Silence notifications. With more and more parents working remotely, Hammond says it can be difficult to disconnect, but before you have a conversation, there are few steps to take.

"I do recommend some of my clients to take that time to go outside," he says. "Take that time to go to a different room because work is always going to be there. Stressors are always going to be there but there is time in our schedules where we can put the phones down, we can close

the electronics and we can disengage from the stressors that we are having and really dedicate to what is going on in this current state."

Work on body language. Don't scroll on your screen or look out the window while someone is talking to you. Instead, face the person you're talking to and make eye contact with them. Nod and smile (if smiling is appropriate for the conversation, of course) to convey that you're paying attention to what the speaker is saying.

Ask questions. "One of the biggest qualities of a good listener is being genuinely interested," he says. When it comes to your kids, take time to ask questions about things they are interested in, whether it's a video game, sport or class. Say things like, "Can you teach me about that? What made you love it so much?"

If you didn't understand something, ask questions for clarity.

Don't interrupt. In an article from Forbes on 10 steps to effective listening, the writer notes that interruption sends a variety of messages to the speaker, including that the listener doesn't care what they think, that they are more important than the speaker and what they're saying is more relevant.

"We all think and speak at different rates. If you are a quick thinker and an agile talker; the burden is on you to relax your pace for the slower, more thoughtful communicator — or for the guy who has trouble expressing himself," the writer adds.

DROWNING OUT DISTRACTIONS

Today's world is full of distractions and, as a result, we have stopped listening to each other. So many of us are busy replying to emails and scrolling our social media feeds that we can't truly connect with those right in front of us. And, it's likely our relationships have suffered. So, how can you become a better listener for your child, spouse, friend or coworker? A local psychologist offers five tips for honing your listening skills in this month's installment of *Opening Minds, Ending Stigma*. We hope you'll find this information helpful and share it with others in your life who may be struggling to truly listen to their loved ones, friends and colleagues.



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