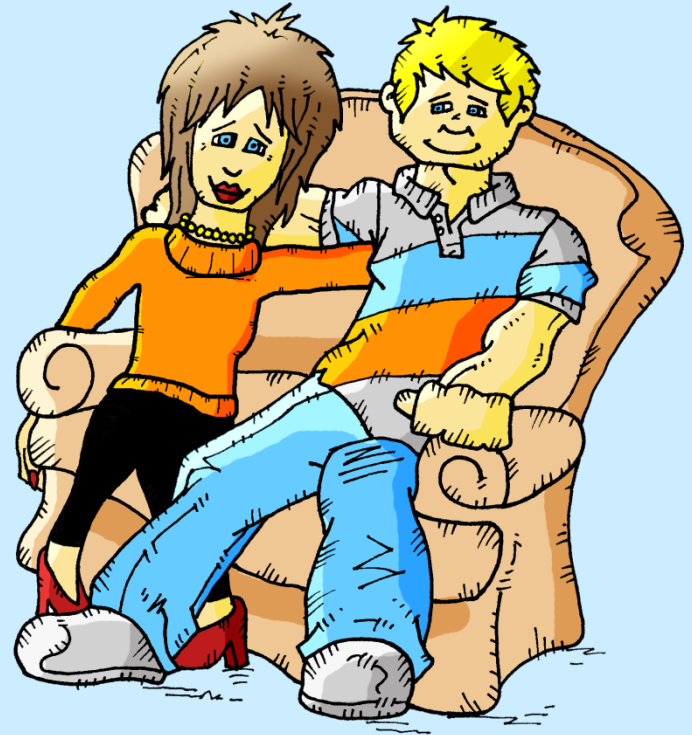


PART SEVEN

Listening Skills Development



Perhaps you are a good listener already?



Tick those statements where you can be confident that 'Yes' is you.

1. I don't interrupt
2. I try to understand my partner's point of view even when I don't agree
3. I am good at giving undivided attention when my partner is talking
4. I don't decide how to respond until my partner has finished speaking
5. I don't switch to my topic until my partner has finished their point
6. I ask follow-up questions to encourage my partner to continue talking
7. When my partner expresses different views to mine,
I try to understand how he/she got to think differently to me
8. My partner they would say that I am a good listener

You can't listen and compose your response at the same time!

- A big block to effective listening is thinking about your response while your partner is still talking.
- Thinking that you will forget something you want to say in response may be a big problem too.
- If these are problems for you, have a pen and paper handy and jot down bullet points to remind you what to come back to.
- Make sure you understand the way they are feeling by asking follow-up questions. Think about your response only when you are clear why your partner is feeling the way they do.

Yes, but.....



Empathy means understanding without necessarily agreeing

- Empathy is key to successful communication. Remember - empathy is understanding 'where the other person is coming from', not having to agree with their point of view.
- Even when you find it impossible to agree with what your partner is saying, try to be empathic, to understand why they are thinking and feeling the way they do.
- Try to convince them you understand their point of view even when you don't agree with it. Your partner will be much more ready to listen to you if they feel listened to by you.

Where there is unresolved deep hurt, it may be impossible for you to even begin to be understanding, in which case Couples Counselling or Personal Counselling is called for.

Empathy and listening skills development starts with the right attitude

An empathic attitude.....

'Even though I may never see what happened the way you do, I want to understand your perspective - understand what you are thinking, how you are feeling and why you reacted in the way you did'

An empathy seeking attitude will also be evident in your tone!

Listen to yourself. Do you sound as though you want to understand?

Or is there anger, frustration, criticism in your voice?

Occasionally, I have said to couples, 'You say you love each other, but there is no love in the way you talk to each other'. When they soften their tone the atmosphere in the therapy room changes too!



Understanding your partner's point of view

.....become them for a while.

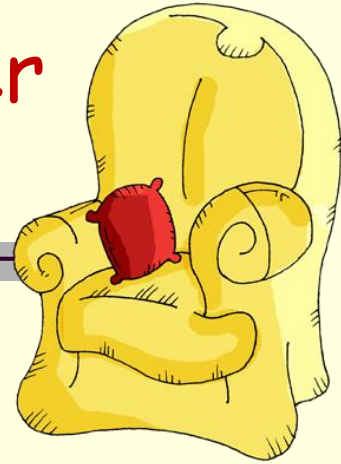
All you need is another chair, an interest in understanding your partners point of view and the place to yourself.

- Sit in the other chair and become your partner for a while.
- Explain things out loud, as you think they might explain them.
- When you return to your chair, spend a little time thinking what they need from you based on what you have heard yourself say.
- If you realise that your behaviour has been unhelpful, decide what, if anything, you are going to do about it.



Suspend
scepticism -
try it.
You may be
surprised how
much two chair
work can change
perspectives by
giving you
empathic insight

Swap places with your partner for empathy building

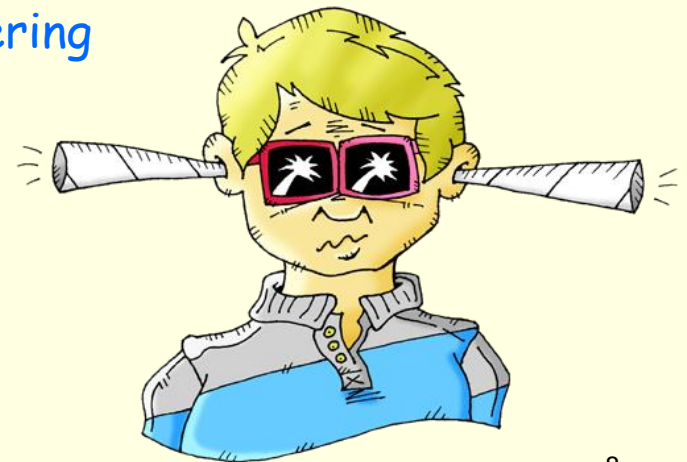


A really good way of building empathy is to swap places and talk as each other.

- In couples counselling I will sometimes ask the couple to swap chairs and speak from their partner's perspective. They initially find this difficult as they may previously have made little attempt to see things from their partner's perspective. Now they find themselves having to focus totally on understanding their partner's point of view so they can express it.
- Sometimes I ask the client to become their absent partner and I interview them. I well remember a male client who was very angry with his wife's behaviour towards him. In mid-interview with him playing his wife, he stopped, burst into tears and said, 'I have really failed to support her, haven't I? No wonder she is being the way she is'.

Their information and yours is always incomplete and different in some ways

- When you can't understand someone's point of view, remember, there is always an information gap between you.
- Ask yourself:
 - 'How did they get to think that way?'
 - 'What might they be taking into account that I don't know?'
 - 'What am I taking into account that they might not know?'
- Two people arguing are never both considering the same 'facts', because 'facts' are often an opinion, an opinion based on filtered and biased recollection of incomplete information. [Part Eight]



What are they taking into account that you aren't?

What a stupid way to think!

JUDGEMENTAL

I wonder how they got to think that way?

EMPATHIC

It's vital to demonstrate that you understand

I don't agree with her, but how can I show her I understand?

- Until someone who is angry or hurt feels heard, they are deaf to reason. If you want to calm the other person and get your own point across, you are not only going to have to listen carefully, but also show that you heard, really heard, and understand how they are feeling.
- This can be achieved by playing back to the person what they have told you.
'So you are angry because I.....'
'You are feeling hurt because I.....'



Demonstrating that you understand how the other person feels is an essential and often overlooked aspect of good listening.

Don't let your partner not listen

- Set aside dedicated talking time. This could take the form of a 'Civilised Discussion'
- Some struggling couples have regular progress review sessions.
- Don't carry on talking when it's obvious that your partner isn't listening. Be assertive. Confront auto-nod and auto-grunt behaviour by stopping talking in mid-sentence and holding silence until your partners notices.
- Stop talking if your partner is making notes, wait until you have their full attention again.



The right attitude is key to effective listening -
wanting to understand