



Listening With A Twist

by Sue Yockey, VCES Counselor

Most likely when you glanced at the title of this article you were drawn to the initial word — listening. Then the thoughts may have begun with, “Great article for me. My child does not listen to me.” Or, “I can always use a listening ear or be one for someone in need.” I can imagine your brain activity after these thoughts. “With a twist must mean these initial thoughts aren’t accurate. There must be a new method to getting someone to listen.” Here is the twist.

Twist, as defined by Webster, means to bend or turn something in order to change its shape. As I see it, we traditionally think of listening as something we do with our ears. For purpose of this article, I assert that listening has more to do with brain activity or our thoughts about a person. That’s how listening can change its shape. For example, what was Jesus’ listening of the “woman at the well?” He thought of her as a Child of God who deserved the same amount of acknowledgement as all people do.

What would the world be like if we listened to people as God listens us? God allows us to choose good or evil, but God’s listening of us is always inspiringly positive. In the first book of the Bible it is written, “So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:29)

Once, when I had the task of visiting the sick in a hospital, I heard someone calling out from a room. It was next on the list so I peeked in. I saw an elderly woman sitting on the edge of her bed, alone, and yelling out nonsense words. I passed her room and continued my rounds. My listening of her was clear in my mind. This woman was old, was not living in reality, was not able to carry on a conversation, was not receptive of my visit, and was not going to care if I stopped by or not. I continued my visits. All the conversations with the other patients were pleasant as I listened to their needs and spoke words of encouragement.

As I completed my rounds, I felt the afternoon was a success. My good deed would be rewarded. Of course, as I was leaving I had to walk past the one room I had skipped. Do I stop in? Upon arriving at

her semi-opened door, I saw she was quietly sleeping so I tiptoed in. I was about to leave a written message when I heard, “Who’s there?” I froze for a second and then softly explained that I was making rounds visiting the patients.

She said, “Thank you for visiting me. You are a ray of sunshine, like the first flower after a winter’s storm.” With a heart filled with humility I said, “Thank you.” I don’t remember anything else from that visit but it was a moment in my life that left a lasting impression.

My listening of her was so far off. It had been colored by my own thoughts and feelings. I repeat: What would the world be like if we listened to people as God listens to us? With the next interaction you have with a child, a relative, a coworker, a stranger or a friend, let your listening of them be positive and find the inspiration he or she is. Listen for the presence of God. God speaks to us through others. We need only to listen with a twist.

Lean On Me

by Teisha Parchment, VCMS Counselor

The fall and winter months bring wonderful opportunities to see the beauty of nature with fall colors and bright green, mossy trees. For many families, it’s a season of celebrations and festivities. But for some individuals, dark and rainy days generate experiences of seasonal depression, holidays become reminders of loved ones lost, and there are less opportunities for the benefit of being as physically active outdoors. Though suicide rates peak in the spring and summer months, these challenges added with the ups and downs of puberty and the pressures of perfection can sometimes make for a difficult experience. So, what would you do if you saw a text or found out that one of your child’s friends is talking about suicide? What would you say to your child? And how do you talk to your child about the topic? What if you found out that your own child is struggling with the issue themselves?

These are very difficult questions to ponder. But, what we know about suicide is that there are warning signs and a large percentage of youth tell someone about their plans. Most people are just thinking about escaping the pain that they feel and believe that it’s the only way out. So, the best approach is to be prepared on how to respond. Here are some suggestions:

1. Don’t freak out.
2. Listen without judgment.
3. Respond, do not ignore.
4. Treat it like any other medical issue and seek professional help. If your child’s arm was broken, you wouldn’t hesitate to take them to the doctor. So, please don’t hesitate to seek help.

Understand that we all have experiences of sadness and difficulty throughout our lives. But, when it gets to the point where someone is thinking about and planning suicide, they no longer have the skills to cope and it becomes dysfunctional. It’s time to ask for help. Sometimes students cannot see past what they are feeling and they need someone else to lean on. So, be informed and fill your tool box,

so that when the time comes and someone leans on you, you know what to do. When students have all the tools and resources to cope with these challenging experiences they are able to navigate those ups and downs in a healthy way.

Resources:

- Washington County Crisis Line – 503-291-9111
- Free online course (CALM) – <http://training.sprc.org>
- Sources of Strength – <https://sourcesofstrength.org>
- Parent Mini Class – "How to Talk to Your Child about Responding to Self-Harm and Risky Behaviors among Peers" at Valley Catholic Middle School on December 15, 2015, from 2:30–3:10 p.m.

Change Starts Now

by Kelsey Manning, VCHS Counselor

As we continue to experience and process the horrific events of mass shootings that seem to be plaguing our nation, it is easy to get angry and frustrated over the overwhelming feeling that there is nothing we as individuals can do. I often feel stuck and helpless each time an event like this occurs as we debate about gun control, mental health, violent video games, parents, schools, communities, etc. It feels like there is *nothing* I can do, that by myself I am helpless and too small to make any difference. But that type of thinking keeps all of us afraid, frustrated and on the sidelines doing nothing. Fortunately, there *is* something we can do, and if each of us does our tiny part in rebuilding this culture, together we can make immense change.

We all have the ability to be compassionate to others and choose how we interact with every person around us *every single day*. As a community we can teach our children how to be compassionate towards others. We can show them that kindness goes a long way; that judging others only separates us and creates an "*us vs. them*" society rather than a unified whole. We can celebrate differences and show that we are no better (and no worse) than our neighbors; that not a single one of us chose the family and lifestyle we were born into; that, rather than judging what our neighbors have or lack, we can reach out and help those who need it, understanding that they could have been us.

We can teach our children about resiliency; that it is important to get back up after they fall down, to keep fighting the battle even when they think they will lose. We can teach them that resiliency will keep them going through the hard times. There will be hard times; no one can avoid setback, but everyone has the ability to overcome their struggles.

We can teach our children to take responsibility for their actions. Too often we see kids blaming others for the mistakes they make. And too often we allow this to happen in order to protect our kids from pain. Unfortunately, blaming others only makes them angry and stuck, putting them into a position of powerlessness with the realization that there is *nothing* they can do to change another person. By taking ownership of their actions instead, kids learn to move forward, make changes and

take responsibility, which ultimately *empowers* them to make a powerful change in their own lives. When we take responsibility for ourselves *we can do something.*

This is a hard lesson for kids to learn because as a parent (or teacher, coach or friend) it means sitting back and watching those we care about feel pain, frustration, anger and sadness. However, when they don't learn these important life lessons at a young age — while parents are still around to help guide, explain, regulate and support them in the process — kids will just have to wait and learn it later in life, when they are on their own. This, unfortunately, is often too late. By doing our part in teaching these lessons now, we can learn that there is another way. There *can* be a culture of acceptance, compassion and change, and our community really can become a safer place. *But, that change must start now and it must start with us.*

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