

A lot of people speculate about how 'easy' my job as a psychotherapist is. On the surface it may look like a lot of nodding and not much else. Lots of people assume that it's about giving advice and 'fixing' people. Some even think you just sit there and listen, and anyone could do it.

However, listening - I mean real listening, active listening, the kind that is the most powerful - is a skill which is not easy to master.

When listening to other people's problems, we all have a tendency to rush in to relate our own version of their stories; or give advice; or placate, which is all well and good but not the best way to make people feel heard and understood. It is very difficult to quietly sit and just listen.

The younger generation are particular sufferers of the 'not listened to'.

Ask any teenager if their parents understand or listen to them and 90% will say not at all! They are surrounded by adults - parents, teachers, siblings, family members - who all want to give advice, guide, direct, reprimand, criticise, when really all they need is to be listened to... really listened to... and heard.

In relationships, often the woman will want a moan about a friend, or work or a problem, and the man (as men are natural fixers) will leap in with advice on how to deal with it. However, she does not necessarily need a fix (if she did she would ask), she just wants to be heard and understood.

A nod and a sympathetic "Gosh, how frustrating for you. Do you want a cup of tea?" and a hug would suffice! Instead what usually happens is the man gives lots of (good) advice, which she doesn't take, and then he refuses to listen further because he told her what to do about it and she did nothing!



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Listening properly is a skill to master



Counsellor Amanda Jayne has some important advice to share . . . but you'll have to listen carefully.

So how can we listen better?

Firstly, acquire a mental shelf on which to put your own opinions; words of advice; your own experiences etc, rather than voicing them. This is about the other person, not you.

Secondly, imagine an invisible zipping up of your mouth. Listening is not speaking! Listening is just that, saying nothing until you are sure that the other person has finished what they are saying.

Thirdly, try to put yourself in their shoes ... how do you imagine they are feeling in the situation they are describing? Then say it: "That sounds really frustrating/hurtful/painful for you" or "That sounds like hard work/a

nightmare". Then apply the zip again. Let them respond and do not give your version or advice unless they ask for it.

Fourthly, try not to pass judgement, they are describing events from their frame of reference, not yours.

It feels as it feels to them, which maybe different from any reaction you may have. We are all different and have different tolerance levels.

I would ask that you just try it and see what happens. That uncommunicative teen may well open up to you more than they ever have. Your partner may feel very grateful that you understand them.

The hardest part of all of the above is keeping your opinions, viewpoints and experiences to yourself. It's best to say nothing than to express any of that.

Just LISTEN quietly, reflect what you think it is they are feeling ... then make them a cuppa.

You won't believe the difference this makes . . . if you can do it! 

Ask Amanda Jayne

I would love to hear from you and will reply to your letters which, if we print them, will remain anonymous, and your details will be treated confidentially.

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