Look before you speak!

Everybody likes to speak. Few think of listening. Most people think that 'Communication' is conveying what is in one's mind. There are many manuals and courses to guide you to make yourself

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heard, how to motivate people with your words etc. Rarely do we hear much about courses on listening. However listening is a very important factor in building relationships especially family life.

Listening is not the same as hearing. Hearing is passive. Listening implies actively paying attention.

Moreover hearing focuses on the content. When I listen, I pay attention to what is said and also to the person of the speaker. So, listening is not only receiving what is said, but also a relationship between me and the one who is speaking. Hence, attentive listening strengthens family relationship.

Quality of my hearing will depend on the quality of my listening. That will depend on a few things such as my mental and physical disposition at the time of listening, attitude and feeling towards the speaker, my interest in the subject etc.

Problems occur in family life when both partners want to speak while both are not inclined to listen. An example is when both come together after a day of hard work and both are tired. Both have something to say and each one is itching to say that. Both want to get the attention and complain, "You are not listening to me." At such time your husband will feel disgusted if you begin to pour out your mind when he is not in a mood to listen. If it happens often, your husband will experience a internal resistance to listen to you and finally not paying attention to you will become a habit. Similarly, if you are the husband and you begin to tell many things or ask many questions when your wife is not inclined to listen, she may not hear most of what you say and if you do it often, she will lose interest in listening to you. Gradually you will see that you are moving apart from each other. So the first principle here is, "Look before you speak." See if your partner is tired, preoccupied or busy. Speak when you partner is free enough to listen to you. When both are tired or preoccupied it is better to limit the conversation to the essentials, but show your concern for each other through nonverbal signs.

And when you listen, do it with full attention. If you are unable to give full attention, ask for a time when both of you are disposed to listen to each other. But later it is your duty to remind if your partner forgets, so that you do not give the impression that you are avoiding the issue.

When two young persons are in love they listen, not only to what is said, but also to the person. In fact they give more importance to the person than the words spoken. So also in family life, listening has a special significance because you are interested not only in the topic but also in the person. Your spouse is your life partner and your wellbeing and happiness depends very much on his or her wellbeing and happiness. So when you pay attention to your partner you not only hear the content but also to show concern and interest in the person through your body language. But most of the time we get carried away by the topic and forget the person. So, we don't get sufficiently connected.

A more difficult time is when there is a difference of opinion. We get into argument and in the end we lose the dialogue and the relationship. However there are some who allow full expression and then say, "I have heard your point, but I see it differently." They know that allowing expression does not mean approval.

The more important thing is to be more interested in listening than speaking. Always listen to your partner's point of view before you speak out your mind. When you listen attentively, you are indirectly saying, "You are important to me." Even if you do not agree with what your partner says, the fact that you have listened attentively gives a satisfaction to your partner that you respect your partner's point of view.

There are few things we need to keep in mind about listening in family life. The first thing is to have an active interest in the person. Then comes the desire to listen. After that comes the habit of listening with full attention to the content and the person.

When you pay attention to what is said and also to the person, you understand the content and also the feelings. Your partner feels satisfied and says, "You have UNDERSTOOD ME." So, the quality of your listening will be measured by the satisfaction your partner experiences for having spoken to you. You too will be satisfied that you have understood your partner. Thus your patient and attentive listening brings satisfaction to both of you.

The body language is very important here. Usually in inter-personal communication our body language communicates our mind more than the words we speak. We can say, "I love you" very sarcastically or angrily or we can say, "I hate you" with a very loving smile. The listener gets the correct message from our body language. When someone smiles, we can easily understand what kind of smile it is - a sarcastic smile, condescending smile, ridiculing smile, angry smile, a pretended smile or a hearty loving smile. Our attitudes come across through our body language. Body does not lie. So, in inter-personal communication the attitude is very important. When we listen we can make sure that we have an attitude of love and respect and then listening becomes a tool to cement our spousal relationship. When we think in these terms we see how lucky we are to have so much opportunity to deepen our bond. So, let us not miss these golden opportunities to listen to each other and use them to strengthen our love. Let us also be aware that if we are not careful about our listening the opposite also can happen.

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