

## How to be an Award Wining Listener

- Set aside distractions and busyness.
- Focus your attention – don't just pretend to listen or listen with half an ear. Don't daydream or let your mind wander while your spouse is speaking.
- Demonstrate respect for your spouse while listening. Let them finish what they have to say without interrupting. When they are finished, ask for clarification if you are not sure of their meaning.
- Don't get sidetracked by details. Listen for the overall picture. Hear their heart. Don't mentally criticize or take apart what they are saying while they are speaking. Don't let inaccurate wording or charged expressions keep you from hearing their message.
- Avoid using phrases like, "You always..." or "You never..." These leave no room for improvement or even small amounts of success.
- Determine what the felt need and real need(s) are. Does your spouse just want to be heard? Are they crying out for justice? Are they afraid and coming to you for security? Are they trying to manipulate your feelings?
- If your spouse just wants to be heard, don't try to "fix" everything. It is tempting to use these times to "rearrange their furniture" – to try to make them change. If you do this, don't be surprised if they don't come to you in the future.
- Don't plan what you are going to say while your spouse is talking. This takes you away from listening well. It also causes you to focus on yourself rather than them.
- Don't jump to conclusions. Give your spouse time and show interest while they tell the whole story. Show interest with good eye contact and occasional verbal responses, i.e. wow, really, how does that make you feel, I am so sorry, etc. When possible get both sides of the story before you make judgments.
- Don't get emotionally revved up about the topic. Listen calmly. If matters are upsetting, say you need time to think before you give a response. Take that time, whether it is a couple of hours or a day. Be sure to come back and finish the conversation when you are both calm.
- Do not feel compelled to have all the answers. If you don't know what an answer should be, say so. Tell your spouse you will get more info and get back to them.
- If opinions differ, agree to disagree. Don't get into a tug of war about who's right or wrong. It's a NO WIN for both! You can disagree without being disagreeable. Yet, be aware of the "non-negotiables." Truth is absolute. Spiritual matters don't bend to human thinking.

Adapted from *How to be a Good listener as a Parent*, Intentional Parenting © Linda Stahnke 2012