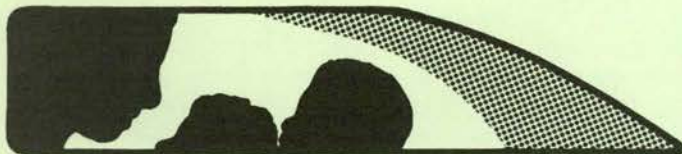


young families

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Are You Listening?

As we listen to people talk, we hear all kinds of evidence that there are breakdowns in communications: "I didn't know he felt that way." "If I'd only realized how important this was to her." "I can't talk to my husband about this."

Research has shown that communication between a husband and wife tends to decline through the years. Studies also suggest that continuing to talk together and listening to what each other says is important in maintaining a marriage where husband and wife keep up with each other's growth and development.

Creating a good communication network within a young family requires a willingness to work and a belief in the dignity of each family member. Families all too often have fallen into the habit of taking one another for granted; messages are difficult to decipher, and both self-respect and respect for other members of the family frequently are cast aside.

Listening is the foundation of good communication. To be listened to is one of our very basic needs. Inattentiveness implies lack of interest in the person talking, as much as in their topic of conversation. How many of us realized that about 50 percent of the time we spend in communicating must be spent listening?

"We listen only to those who flatter, amuse, or comfort us, and you know that's not many people."

Mignon McLaughlin, *The Neurotic's Handbook*

We can try to improve our communication if we listen to the unpleasant as well as the pleasant. Have you noticed how differently we respond to unpleasant things? If someone praises us we think he has good judgment. If he criticizes us, we "take it with a grain of salt" or assume he's not feeling well that day. It's important to communicate unpleasant, as well as pleasant feelings. We need to know the things we do which upset others if we are to improve our relationships with them. Allowing the expression of all kinds of feelings recognizes that feelings are facts. Allowing honesty of expression can improve communication.

Listen sensitively. Being a sensitive listener means listening for what the person is trying to tell you. Sometimes a person's behavior or body conveys a different message than his/her word's. The person who says, "I'm not a bit worried," may be giving you some other clues. The very fact that worry is denied gives you a clue. Why would he mention it if he weren't thinking about it?

Listen without judging. Often when some member of the family tells us something, we act as an investigator or cross-examiner. If we want to keep open lines of communication, we need to learn to listen without judging. Listening without judging does not mean that we are condoning the person's actions. It means (1) we are accepting his/her feelings about what he/she does and (2) we are learning and storing up in our minds those areas in which we need to strengthen our relationships at a later, more appropriate time.

Listen to yourself as well as others. It's probably easier to listen to others than to ourselves, but we must take stock of ourselves once in awhile. Think back over what you said in a situation and how your spouse or child reacted. We can learn how others tend to react to certain words and the feelings others have. If you are constantly being misunderstood, look at the way you've sent your messages. Listen to how you respond to differences of opinion. Do you really accept the fact that there are individual differences between you and your spouse or your child? Do you share your true feelings, or do you withhold them?

Listen to your tone of voice when you speak to your spouse or child. Is it harsh, gruff, whining, shrill, demanding, possessive, purring, loving, or monotonous? Tone of voice can communicate to the other person something over and above the verbal message.

If you can accept the fact that behavior or action often means different things to the person on the receiving end than to the person who is acting, you are on the way to greater understanding. People make better partners and parents if:

- (1) they are as concerned with understanding other members of their family as they are with being understood
- (2) they recognize that communication is listening as well as talking
- (3) they recognize that we communicate by our words, by our bodily expressions, and by our behavior.

(Compiled by Ron Pitzer, *Extension Family Life Specialist, University of Minnesota*)

Understanding Handicapped Persons

Reading books can be an effective way to help your child understand handicapped persons. The following is a sample listing:

- A Hospital Story* by Sara Bonnett Stein
- Don't Feel Sorry For Paul* by Bernard Wolf
- Howie Helps Himself* by Joan Fassler
- Lisa and Her Soundless World* by Edna Levine
- Mine For Keeps* by Jean Little
- One Little Girl* by Joan Fassler
- Please Don't Say Hello* by Phyllis Gold

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Check with your librarian for other suggestions. Ask to see a copy of *Notes From A Different Drummer: A Guide to Juvenile Fiction Portraying The Handicapped*, by Barbara Baskin and Karen Harris. It reviews and evaluates over 300 books written for children in which one of the main characters is disabled. The authors focus primarily on attitudes conveyed in the books and which books provide insight and understanding about the realities of disability.

Perhaps the best way to help your children understand the handicapped is to permit them, encourage them, and provide them opportunities to know handicapped persons, both children and adults, *personally*. If they have this opportunity, they will learn above all that handicapped persons are people, with certain skills and weaknesses just like all of us.

Encourage your children's teachers to have learning activities on understanding persons with a handicap. Films and speakers are available from Courage Center, Pacer Center, Inc., and the Minnesota Council for the Handicapped.

Winter Dressing Tips

When you're dressing your children or yourself for the cold, think about how long you'll be outdoors. If you're going to be out for several hours, add layers of clothing to the torso. But if out for only a short time, concentrate on the extremities (feet and hands).

Feeling cold serves as a warning device that it's time to go inside. If you're outside for a long time with a lot of insulation on your hands and feet, the clothing could disrupt this warning signal. Your body temperature could drop to a dangerously low level without you being aware of it.

Mother knows best. You should wear a hat, hood, or scarf when it's cold outside. The reason? About 90 percent of body heat is lost through the head.

A few more tips: Mittens are usually warmer than gloves. Shoes with crepe or rubber soles will keep feet warmest. A scarf over your mouth and nose will help warm cold air before it gets to your lungs. The thickness of a garment is a better clue to its warmth than its weight.



Food, Not Pills

If you're worried that your family's diet isn't providing the vitamins and minerals needed, look to your grocery purchases, not the vitamin section of your drug store. Even with food prices rising, a variety of foods still supplies the best nutrition for the money spent.

Taking extra vitamins and minerals will not necessarily balance an unbalanced diet. Also, your body needs fiber to

mix and move nutrients through the digestion process, and vitamin/mineral supplements do not contain fiber.

Vitamin manufacturers and retailers often play up the issue of "not having time to eat right" or "not knowing what's in the food we eat." People who may need vitamin/mineral supplements are children with no appetite, or persons having had surgery, an infection or drug therapy. In any of these situations, taking supplements should be done with a doctor's advice and care.

In the right amounts, vitamins and minerals are nutrients that help the body maintain itself. In large amounts, vitamins and minerals are not drugs with miracle powers and when taken in excess, can have dangerous side effects. Examples include too many vitamins A and C and too much calcium.

It is quite easy to get our daily supply of vitamins and minerals by eating foods from each of the food groups. The following shows the minerals and vitamins supplied by each food group; of course they provide other nutrients:

| <u>Milk and Cheese</u> | <u>Fruits and Vegetables</u> |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| calcium Vitamins A and D | vitamins A and C iron and calcium trace minerals |
| <u>Meat, Poultry, Fish, Beans</u> | <u>Whole grain or Enriched Breads and Cereals</u> |
| iron B vitamins | B vitamins iron |

In This Issue

This newsletter is published for young families in the Twin Cities area by the Agricultural Extension Service of your University of Minnesota. I would appreciate your suggestions for its content. Call me at 872-9441.

Eileen Anderson

Eileen G. Anderson, Urban Extension Agent

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