

Session 4: Accurate Listening

What makes Listening Accurately so difficult?

When we are living with a loved one with mental health or addiction issues, we often have so many thoughts and feelings that we have difficulty staying present. When we listen to something and become upset we “surrenders [sic] our power to the other” (Jon Kabat-Zin)

How can we be sure we are listening to the message our loved one is intending to send?

Start with clarifying what your loved one is needing. Validation? Agreement? Problem solving? Skill building? When you know your role, it helps you listen differently. When we are listening for our opportunity to talk or advise, we rarely hear the full intended message.

What if I'm needing to hear something specific from my loved one?

It is normal to have needs in relationships. Even when our loved one is the identified patient, we can be searching for a repair to our loss, our fears, and our trauma related to the loved one's illness or other behaviors. It is very difficult to listen until you've been heard. This makes it tricky. If you can use distress tolerance skills and validate the speaker's needs, you will be much more likely to have an opportunity to have your needs met as well.

How do I show that I am listening?

Typical goals of a speaker are to achieve an objective (e.g., “To have a safe home.”), to take care of themselves (e.g., “For my wellbeing I accept that I am only in charge of my recovery.”), or to affect their relationship (e.g., “I want to be able to enjoy each other even when we have different ideas.”). Think about listening fully using the GIVE acronym: have a Gentle approach, appear interested, validate the speaker, have an easy manner.

What if I cannot accept this situation my loved one is in?

Radical acceptance is a practice that allows you to let go of the pain and not the person. Before we can change any situation, we must first accept the situation as it is. If you radically accepted that you cannot force your ideas or your will on another person, how would you listen differently? In the case of your loved one, if critique and suggestions were effective tools for creating change, your loved one would already be healed.

How do I tolerate my fears?

There are techniques to help you hear what you do not want to hear. You can work with your own biology to stay calm and in your wise mind, and your coping ahead skills to rehearse managing things in skillful ways.

I wish there was an App for this!

Lucky you! There's a simple app called the Dime Game and it helps you decide how strongly to ask for something or deny a request. It uses 10 elements to consider when asking for or accepting a request. And it is kind of fun.