

from the
Leadership
Files

Building a Team-Based
Ministry

A Relational Mentoring
Model

Signs of Sexual
Addiction

Recognizing Child
Abuse and Neglect

The Art of Listening

Building Character

Values Casting

The art of listening



As a counselor, the deliberate act of listening tells my client that he is worth knowing, his experiences are worth sharing, and his thoughts have important meaning. The same would hold true if I were listening to my spouse or a friend.

Here are five specific ways to brush up on your listening skills.

1. Listen to and with the body. Consider your own body language. Listening with your body in an open posture, arms open, legs uncrossed and with your body facing toward the person nonverbally conveys your interest and attention. Eye contact, nods of the head and verbal prompts such as, “I see,” may also be helpful if culturally appropriate. Consider also the other person’s body language. What is she telling you with her posture, eyes and countenance?

2. Listen to the context. The environment a person lives, works and plays in can contribute to your understanding of his current circumstances.

3. Listen with the third ear. What is not said can convey volumes. Listen

to what is being left out of the conversation, what may be skipped over or what may be implied. If appropriate, gently inquire about these areas to gain a more complete understanding.

4. Listen with reflection. You can provide a mirror to reflect how the other person is feeling. Rephrasing what you have heard helps her feel heard and may provide opportunity for her to gain deeper personal insight. For example, “It sounds like you are frustrated that your friend did this, and you wish something else would have happened.”

5. Listen without an agenda. It is difficult to convey genuine interest in another person if you’re focusing more on what you will say next than on what the other person is saying. To be fully present in the moment is to be free from an unspoken agenda that seeks to meet your own need rather than the speaker’s need.

Listening for the sole purpose of connecting, affirming and coexperiencing life can be a powerful blessing. Among other things, true listening involves many of the characteristics mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13: patience, kindness and excitement for the truth. Listeners do not behave jealously, arrogantly, unbecomingly, selfishly, vengefully nor with anger. When you’re listening, you are demonstrating Christ’s love.

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Recognizing child abuse and neglect

Most of us have felt uneasy at times about the way a child was being treated. Feeling this particular kind of worry about a child in your own church can be disheartening, a little scary and awkward. Unfortunately, child abuse and neglect can exist in our own churches. In my state, a child of a family of faithful church attendees died from severe neglect. No one from the church had reported the neglect.

What exactly is child abuse and neglect? Child abuse is the physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. Neglect is the negligence of a child's welfare by a person who is responsible for the child. This can include failure to provide appropriate clothing for the climate, medical care, food, a clean and safe home, regular education, and/or supervision that is age appropriate to the child.

How can I know if a child is being abused or neglected? Look for a combination of any of the following indicators over time: unexplained marks, burns, bite marks, cuts or bruises; resistance to going home; fear of adults in general or specific adults, such as all men or all women; difficulty concentrating; apathy or depression; inappropriate sexual behavior or knowledge for the age of the child; clothing that is not suited to the weather; being consistently dirty; extreme hunger; lack of supervision; and/or a sudden change in behavior. If you have a "gut reaction" about a situation, look for other indicators.

The most important thing you can do is report *suspected* child abuse



or neglect. No one wants to report abuse falsely, but it is always better to allow professionals to investigate a situation that seems risky to a child.

How do I report child abuse or neglect? Call one of the following:

- local police or sheriff's office
- local office of social services or family and children's services
- Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-4-A-CHILD

What happens after I call? In most cases reporting is anonymous. Even if you give your name to the police or social services, the information is confidential. After a report is taken, qualified professionals investigate the suspected abuse or neglect. Based on the findings, appropriate services will be offered to the family.

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Signs of sexual addiction



God clearly hates sexual sin. Yet, in His mercy, he tirelessly seeks the restoration and healing of the person consumed by the fires of sexual sin. Where we may seek judgment, God desires healing and reconciliation.

The cries of men and women caught in the grip of sexually compulsive behavior are bitter and anguished. Addicts need to know that God doesn't hate them—he hasn't given up on them.

The following questions can help a person identify sexual addiction.

1. Does he continually give in to specific sexual impulses?
2. Does she often spend more time or effort in sexual behaviors than she intended?
3. Is he unable to stop, reduce or control the sexual behaviors?
4. Does she spend an unusual amount of time trying to get sex, having sex or recovering from sex?

5. Is he preoccupied with sexual behavior or preparation for sexual behavior?
6. Does the behavior get in the way of work, school, home or social responsibilities?
7. Does she continue to do it even though she knows that social, financial, psychological or physical problems will result or are made worse by the behavior?
8. Does he need to increase the intensity, frequency or risk involved or to add new behaviors over time to achieve the same satisfaction?
9. Has she given up or limited social, work or recreational activities because of the behavior?
10. Is he distressed, anxious, restless or irritable if he can't engage in the behavior?

Research shows that if at least three answers are positive, addiction is present; however, only a licensed mental health practitioner should diagnose and treat sexual addiction.

Through the Holy Spirit's healing power and restorative work, and with counseling, the addict can do more than simply struggle to survive—he or she can live the abundant life.

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For resources dealing with sexual integrity in ministry, visit www.agts.edu/war_within.