



In this issue:

- *Love is... Listening with your heart
- *How We Respond to Bids for Connection
- * 14 Days of Self-Care Tips Challenge
- * Upcoming Events

Love is ...



Listening with your Heart

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How are your listening skills? The majority of us would probably say that we are great listeners (according to us). But what do others think about our listening skills? And how do you know that you are a good listener? I think that those are questions we need to ask ourselves and the people we communicate with to be able to determine if there is any truth to our "great listener" rating. That is not an easy task though, because we must be vulnerable enough to ask and receive criticism which is not fun. However, whether it's our partner, colleague, supervisee, child, or friend, listening is an essential component of a healthy, thriving relationship. When we listen empathically, we listen with our heart and are attuned to the person we are communicating with and that in my book it's an act of love. Think about it, when you have had a meaningful conversation with someone, what made it meaningful? I bet that most of you are going to say that they listened and seemed to care. That is empathic listening, when we are able to give the speaker space to feel heard and validated. As a therapist this is a skill we use in practice but can be utilized in any setting to increase connection/attunement and have healthy relationships. It requires self-awareness, self-control, patience, time, and your undivided attention. Remember we are trying to help the speaker feel validated and heard and that cannot be conveyed when we are checking the phone every minute or distracted with other tasks or judge them. Here's a list to help build awareness and focus on skills that may need strengthening:

- ◆ **A complete lack of Judgement— have to see it from their perspective**
- ◆ **Giving your full attention**
- ◆ **A focus on both Facts and Feelings— Pay attention to body language and non-verbal communication**
- ◆ **Acknowledging Feelings**
- ◆ **Clarifying, summarizing, reflecting and paraphrasing**
- ◆ **Demonstrating that you are listening (verbally and non-verbally)**
- ◆ **Letting the speaker lead the conversa-**
- ◆ **Giving the speaker space to speak**
- ◆ **Responding appropriately when it is required**

Source: <https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/empathic-listening.html>

Do you do any of the things above when you communicate with the people you love? If you do, I commend you on your ability to be present and empathize. If you need to work on some of them, invest the time and effort to get better at them. It will be well worth it, and it is an act of love for yourself and the people around you. Happy Valentine's month.



Marilyn Mejia-Peña, LCSW

HOW WE RESPOND TO BIDS FOR CONNECTION

I listened to Brenè Brown's podcast— Unlocking Us— back in September when she had Julie Schwartz Gottman, PhD and John Gottman PhD as guests. They shared insights on their book *The Love Prescription: 7 days to more intimacy, connection and joy*. If you haven't heard it, I totally recommend it. The information they discussed made so much sense and I'd like to share one of the biggest lessons I got from it as I think it is applicable to any relationship that we value, not just romantic ones. They found that the biggest predictor of happiness in relationships was how people responded to bids for connection. Meaning that in relationships we make physical or verbal requests for attention/connection and depending on how people respond to that, it can make or break the relationship. They found that partners responded in one of these 3 ways:

1. By turning toward—giving a positive or affirmative response.
2. By turning away: by not responding, ignoring or not noticing the attempt to connect
3. By turning against: by responding irritable or angry to shut down the attempt to connect.



Do they sound familiar? They did to me, and have given and received all 3 of them as I suspect most of us have. When we are the receivers of 2 and 3 it feels awful, yet we do them to others as well (intentionally and unintentionally), making them feel awful too. I share this information with the intent to bring self-awareness and hopefully make positive changes to respond to our partners, friends and colleagues mostly by turning towards and in turn strengthening our relationships.



I also want to encourage you to check-in on how your relationship is with your self-care and apply the same concept. For example, are you turning away and ignoring the cries your body and mind make when you need a break by pushing through and not allowing time to breathe, and relax? Are we turning against by telling ourselves “how dare I even think of going for a walk right now when I have so much to do?” or “Be quiet stomach, I have to get through this report, there's no time for lunch, stop whining”? If 2's and 3's are the most prominent responses we have towards our body and mind attempts to connect, let's challenge ourselves to turn towards self-care this month and come up with some ways to respond positively by taking breaks when needed and giving our body and mind the attention and care it requires for our overall wellness.



14 Days of Self-Care Tips Challenge



I will be releasing a daily self-care tip on Instagram leading to Valentine's Day and I challenge you to complete the tip given to promote overall wellness and self-love. Do all 14 and tell us some of the changes you noticed in the comments. Share with friends and colleagues and encourage them to join the challenge too.

UPCOMING EVENTS

*****Virtual Workshop*****

Therapeutic interventions to Treat Anxiety in Children and Adults

Tuesday, February 21st 11a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Cost: \$40

***Pre-registration required**

Please sign up at www.resiliencesocialwork.com

I am available to provide trauma-informed consultation services with a bi-cultural perspective to collaborate on organizations with program design, staff development and support. I also conduct in-service trainings customized to your organization's needs which may include topics on domestic violence, clinical skill building, child welfare, and staff wellness/burnout prevention. Please contact me for more info.