

There is a difference between listening and waiting for your turn to speak –
Simon Sinek

Session 7

Effective Listening and the Art of Asking Questions

This Session demonstrates effective listening and the art of asking questions. It will define what effective listening is and will teach a person how to take steps to be an effective listener. It will also teach a person to ask questions in a way that will be helpful in allowing a person to come to their own conclusions or solutions.

Effective Listening and the Art of Asking Questions

“Effective listening helps to build relationships, solve problems, ensure understanding, resolve conflicts, and improve accuracy. At work, effective listening means fewer errors and less wasted time. At home, it helps develop resourceful, self-reliant kids who can solve their own problems. Listening builds friendships and careers. It saves money and marriages.” Dianne Schilling

Quotation 1: If you listen to a parent long enough, not only will they tell you what is currently going on in their lives, but you will be able to see what strengths exist within their families even if they can't recognize those strengths themselves.

Quotation 2: When someone truly listens to me, and does not interrupt with judgments, criticisms, stories of their own or even good advice, I feel better and often figure out what I need to do for my family.

If listening is so important, why is it hard to really listen to another person?

Main points of the presentation:

1. There is a difference in listening and what is called *effective listening*. Effective listening has to do with knowing what we are listening for and deciphering important relevant information.
2. In family support, we are basically listening for information that will indicate what a family's values are, what their culture is, what strengths they have, what their goals are for their families, and finally barriers to reaching their goals. What they believe about themselves and their families comes out in conversation. A family might be able to tell you this information when directly asked, or they may not. You must build a relationship with a family before you will be able to really know about their values,

culture, strengths, and barriers but even from little bits of information you can usually find relevant information.

3. What you are listening for is often what you hear and that is why learning to ask questions is an important part of our training.

Questions: What questions might we ask that will give us the information we need to best support the family?

1. **Questions should be open-ended and honest.** An open-ended question is a question that requires a full answer using the subject’s own knowledge or feelings. Closed-ended questions are answered in a short or single word answer.
 - a. Examples of open-ended questions:
 - i. How exactly did the argument between the two of you start?
 - ii. How can I support you?
 - iii. What went well during this meeting? What didn’t go so well?
 - b. Examples of closed-ended questions:
 - i. You feel terrible, today don’t you?
 - ii. Do you want me to call the doctor for you?
 - iii. That school meeting was ridiculous wasn’t it?
2. **Questions should come from deep attentiveness.** Focus on what a person is saying. Try not to be distracted by your thoughts, or your own experiences that may relate to the conversation.
 - a. Tips
 - i. Clarify if you don’t understand, “I think I heard you say that your daughter was on an IEP but isn’t currently?”
 - ii. Ask open-ended questions if there are gaps in information, “What happened at school that made them think she no longer needed an IEP?”
3. **Questions should be helpful in allowing a person to come to their own conclusions and solutions.** We want to empower families and build resiliency by supporting them.
 - a. Examples:
 - i. What do you think you should do in this situation?
 - ii. When this happened to you before how did you handle it?
 - iii. Do you have any information on this kind of thing?

Scenario 1:

Sherry is mother to Alyssa. Alyssa is ten years old and has been diagnosed with ADHD, ODD and Depression. Sherry has just gotten back full custody of Alyssa as Alyssa had been removed from the home, and put into foster care because Sherry was using drugs in the home. Sherry had been hot-lined 10 different times before Alyssa was removed from the home. Alyssa left Sherry's home when she was 4 years old and has been in 4 different foster homes in the last six years. Sherry has always maintained contact with Alyssa although it was sporadic until she stopped using. Sherry has been drug free for 2 years and has followed Children's Divisions requirements in order to get Alyssa back. Sherry and Alyssa live in a mobile home close to the school. Sherry was able to save enough money to buy the mobile home outright, but it needs some work. Alyssa is very angry with Sherry. She feels like Sherry abandoned her and didn't love her enough not to do drugs. Sherry sees a therapist and attends a support group each week in order to stay focused on staying away from drugs, but the stress of having Alyssa often overwhelms her. She has made a few friends at church and they help her work through her problems. She has guilt associated with her past behavior and is working with her therapist to cope with those feelings. Alyssa has issues at school, and is at least one grade level behind. The school calls Sherry at least once a week asking that Sherry pick her up because of one behavior or another. When Sherry goes to the school she feels judged and uncomfortable. She doesn't know what to do for her daughter, but believes that the school could be helping her more than they are. When Alyssa gets upset she curses at whoever is around, she throws things, and she runs away from the classroom. Alyssa's art teacher says that she is very good in the art room, has a natural talent and never seems to become upset there.

Sherry works part time at the gas station up the street because she can walk there. She works during the day so that she can be home with Alyssa at night, but when the school calls her to come and get Alyssa it is very difficult for her to leave her job as she has to get someone to cover for her while she is gone. Her employer is getting fed up with her leaving work all the time to pick up her daughter. One of the Children's Divisions

requirements is she must maintain part time employment so now she is concerned that if she keeps missing work that she will be fired and Alyssa will once again be taken away from her.

Scenario 2:

Logan is a 23-year-old man with a diagnosis of Down Syndrome. During High school he was not considered a good candidate for employment due to communication issues. Logan's family looked into several job coaching opportunities and services and Logan was always deemed unemployable. The family tried a day program and Logan felt so sad there. He wants to work and be a part of the community. The family has him involved in some extended learning classes and he participates in swimming. Logan's dad is at home so they go into the community daily. Logan had an opportunity to work with a Community Resource Center. It started well but the program has ended. Logan's case manager is involved and they are working on home modifications to assist with safety in the home. Approval has not been finalized and it has been 7 months since starting this process. Logan likes to go to the movies he wants to drive a car he wants to be a barber. Logan's parents and brother are guardians. Since Logan has had another disappointing experience the family is really not sure where to begin. Trust has been broken and Logan has so much more to offer than just being at home all day. Should the family just give up so he is safe and not disappointed? Logan has been very firm on his dreams but the family is worried he will once again be dropped from a program or there is no provider.

Scenario 3:

Kathy and Tom have 5 children between them. Four of the children are Kathy's biological children and one, Chelsea, is Tom's biological child. Chelsea came to live with Kathy and Tom because her biological mother, Samantha, couldn't take care of her anymore. Samantha has Crone's disease which causes her to be very sick physically and to take medication that makes her drowsy and confused. Chelsea told the school that her mom was never awake and that there was no food in the house so the school hot-lined Samantha. When Children's Division came into the home they determined that while Samantha wasn't abusing Chelsea, she also wasn't able to take care of Chelsea. Chelsea loves her mother and feels guilty for telling the school that there was no food in the house. Chelsea used to take care of her mother and now worries that there will be no one to help her mom, and that her mom might die while she is away. Because of the commute, and Children's Divisions stipulation that Samantha can't have Chelsea overnight, Chelsea isn't able to see her mom with any regularity. In the six months she has been living with Kathy and Tom, she has seen Samantha once for 8 hours. Before leaving her mother's home, Chelsea would see her dad Tom once every couple of months or so because he lived an hour away which made it difficult to get her back and forth for weekends. Tom's house was crowded and when Chelsea visited she had to sleep on the couch. Plus Chelsea didn't want to leave her friends on the weekends so neither Tom nor Samantha pushed the issue of Chelsea coming to visit every other weekend per the divorce decree. Chelsea is 15 and is diagnosed with ADHD and Bipolar disorder. Kathy's children do not have any known diagnoses.

Chelsea and her new step-sister, Avery, share a room now and both love to watch movies and listen to music. Kathy and Tom agreed to let the girls have a TV in their room with a DVD player which was never allowed before. Chelsea is having a very hard time with the transition to a new school in her junior year and has already been suspended for fighting once. Kathy finds it very difficult to deal with Chelsea because she believes that Chelsea "was allowed to do whatever she wanted" living with her mother, and

therefore, doesn't readily follow the same rules that Kathy's children are expected to follow. Chelsea often comes home late but always texts Kathy to let her know.

Chelsea doesn't understand why she should have a curfew at all. Tom works 60 hours a week and is rarely home. Kathy says she resents the fact that Chelsea loves her mother so much when in her mind Samantha never did much for Chelsea. Kathy is working hard to build a relationship with Chelsea and feels that Chelsea is ungrateful when she doesn't respond in kind. When Kathy talks to Tom about Chelsea or Samantha Tom tells her to "let it go." Tom tells Kathy that Chelsea is going through a tough time, that Samantha is very ill, and that they both deserve compassion, not criticism.

