

Please lend me your ears

Parents need to be attentive listeners. Do not pronounce a verdict for your child without hearing her out

IMAGINE that you are sick and have been feeling quite miserable. You want to visit the doctor to tell him what you have been experiencing, and procure medicine for a comforting cure. But if the doctor hands you a prescription without even asking you about the symptoms you have been suffering then how would you feel about his diagnosis? Obviously, you would be upset about not being heard! Let's introspect and see how many times we offer our children a diagnosis infused with autobiographical rhetoric and prescriptive advice without really listening to their emotional cries? Recently, I was at leadership trainer and family expert Stephen Covey's 8th Habit symposium in Bangalore. A note struck a chord and kept ringing in my mind. Covey said that, 'We all have one month and two ears, and we should use them accordingly!' He places great emphasis on effective listening skills. As parents and as individuals, we have a tendency to talk more and listen less. True understanding can come only from good listening. How many times have we faced a problem in relationships only due to communication gaps or misunderstandings? How many times have you felt that you keep saying, lecturing, or nagging about the same things over and over again, but they fall on deaf ears? Or may be your child has even voiced that you don't understand what he/she feels at times. Remember, communication defines human condition.

In parenting workshops I spend a lot of time on building communication skills of parents. We do a lot role-playing exercises to understand the negative effects of poor communication skills from a child's point of view. Once, parents understand and empathies with this, we help them practice skills of empathetic listening and teach them to use effective tools such as I-messages in communicating positively.

Children have a deep need to feel understood and to belong. According to Abraham Maslow, in the hierarchy of human needs (shelter and food), children needs to feel a sense of belonging, love and validation of themselves. In Maslow's hierarchical pyramid, the basic need is biological, followed by emotional, intellectual, aesthetic and self-actualisation need. Parents are busy giving children *roti, kapra aur makan*, good schooling and exposure, but they often overlook the intricacies of children's emotional need in the busy-ness of life.

Taking out time to truly listen is essential to affirm a child's sense of well-being.

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