

The Power of Listening

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Imagine, your friend is crying because someone started a rumor about her. She comes to you for help. What would you do? Maybe, you would give her some advice based on your experience. However, I have found that giving advice to people who are suffering is not always best. Today I'm going to tell you why you should not rush to give advice to people who have problems.

One day last year, I noticed my classmate crying in our homeroom. I asked her: "What's the matter?" But I couldn't understand her situation and how she felt and the more I listened to her, the more confused I got. So, I just tried to listen to her story carefully. After an hour, she said: "Thank you. I feel better." At that time, I did not know what happened or what I did. On another occasion, I met a lady through my work experience at a hospital. She told me she had cancer that had spread all over her body. I was overwhelmed by what she said and didn't know how to reply. I just nodded and gently rubbed her back while she was talking. I felt so helpless and incompetent but after she finished speaking she told me: "Thank you. You cheered me up." You might think I did nothing special except for listening to their stories carefully. However, I have learned from my experiences that the best thing we can do in these situations is simply listen.

'Active listening' is a communication technique that was proposed by the psychologists, Carl Rogers and Richard Farson in 1957. Rogers and Farson said that "when we encounter a person with a problem our usual response is to try to change his way of looking at things—to get him to see his situation the way we see it or would like him to see it." They suggest that we should listen completely and show support, care and respect to the speaker. By doing this we allow the speaker to think about solutions to their problems themselves. As the listener, you don't have to agree with everything the speaker says, but you should value everything that is being said. You don't have to say anything special or give advice because you may be imposing your opinion on the speaker.

A recent survey by Benesse Corporation discovered that around 72% of Japanese people believe it is difficult to communicate with people who have problems. Many are scared to comfort those with troubles because they don't know what to say and are worried about giving bad advice. Others neglect to listen carefully to their friend's issues because they believe that listening is not important. I think it's time to change our attitude toward listening. Today, active listening is increasingly being used in Japan. For example, 'active listening volunteers' often visit nursing homes or counseling sessions and listen to people's problems. However, there is still more that can be done. I believe that active listening should play a more important role in our society, especially when more and more people are suffering with mental as well as physical problems.

Now it's your turn. Let's think about your friend again. She is crying and comes to you for help. What would you do? Before you heard my speech, you might have given her advice but can you be certain that this would help her? Or would you just be forcing her to see the problem from your point of view? I want to encourage you to embrace the power of listening and help your friend to find their own solutions. This seems very simple but it can be the most powerful therapy for those in trouble. Your ears can change the lives of people who are suffering.

(629 words)