

Habit 5- Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

Wouldn't it be great if they "just listened?"

Habit 5 is Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood- "Listen first. Talk second." Too often instead of really listening, we are busy forming our response in our mind. This Habit is about not just hearing with our ears, but looking at body language with our eyes, and using our hearts as well. We listen to understand who that person is, how they feel about something, and how they view the world.

Ways to apply at home:

Pretend listening: Have your child try to tell you something while you are doing something else. "Pretend listen." (Uh-huh. That's nice.) Talk to them about how that felt. Have them tell you again while you give your child your full attention. Now switch. Have them play or draw while you talk. Then have them really listen. Talk about how it felt for you and them. Remind your child this kind of listening is an example of Think Win-Win.

What feeling? Take turns acting out feelings (happy, sad, bored, hurt, angry, hungry, etc.) without words. Try using appropriate actions rather than exaggerations.

Repeat. Try saying the phrase "I didn't say you did it" varying the tone of voice and emphasizing a different word each time and discuss the way it alters the meaning.

Echo. *For older kids and adults.* Do you have an issue with your spouse or teen. Go to them and say, "Help me understand your point of view on this." Then really listen without interrupting. When they finish, repeat in your own words what you heard. Ask, "Is that right? Is there more?" When they feel heard then ask, "May I share how I feel about this?" Make sure to voice your concerns in a way that acknowledges the other person's value using "I" statements.

Words to use:

"So if I understand, you are saying _____"

"Help me understand your point of view."

"It seems like you are distracted. Is there a better time for me to share this with you?"

"Is now a good time for me to share a concern I have?"

"Excuse me, (young child.) Are you listening or pretend listening?"

"What does your heart think she meant when she said that?"

"I am concerned when I see (you yell at your sister/unfinished homework/etc.) because I know that you are a good kid. Last week you put away the dishes without even being asked. You are usually so thoughtful. Help me understand what is going on here."

Seeking to understand may not be fast, but it pays huge dividends in building relationships.