

GREAT DATES #2

*6 Becoming an Excellent Listener *9*

At Gulf Breeze United Methodist Church we want to start a trend. We want to encourage the couples in fellowship to start making their marriages a priority. We believe that even good marriages need regular time apart to maintain closeness. We also believe that this closeness in marriages can only bring good to all areas of our lives, our families, our church and our community. This is just the beginning, so watch out for things to come!!

God, Himself, listens to each of us personally. In fact, it is one way He ministers to us. As married partners, one way to minister to each other is to listen with undivided attention to each other. Every time we listen we reflect the image of our listening Father. Active listening is one of the best ways to express unselfish love. Listening says, "You are important to me. I care about your ideas, thoughts, feelings and problems."

So, tonight, your goal is to enjoy each other, focus on each other and listen to each other. This is not a "solve all your relationship issues" night. As best you can, shut away the "issues," the kids, the chores, work, money, the in-laws, the football season, the economy, the state of the world...

1. JUST TAKE TIME TO BREATHE AND SETTLE DOWN. Take some deep breaths and let the stress of the week melt away.
2. MAKE SURE YOUR BODY IS RELAXED. If you can, sit across from your spouse so eye contact is possible. Body language communicates way more than words do. Hold hands. Bump shoulders while you are walking. Smile with your whole face, including your eyes.
3. REMEMBER THAT THIS PERSON WITH YOU CHOSE YOU OUT OF THE WHOLE WORLD TO LOVE. ISN'T LOVE AMAZING AND WONDERFUL!! Aren't we blessed to have each other!?
4. FOCUS ON EACH OTHER. LOOK AT EACH OTHER. REMEMBER THAT YOU LOVE THIS PERSON DEARLY.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT FOR THE NIGHT,
should you choose to accept it...

Each of you choose a topic from your week to share. Make it something that does not pertain to your relationship necessarily. It can be about something you realized or experienced that would help your spouse know you a little better. If the topic is non-threatening, it will be easier to practice listening skills. In the interest of having fun, it would be good if it is not too heavy also.

Partner #1 asks: "What is something about you that you would like to share with me?"

Partner#2 shares keeping in mind that the other person might want to share something also.

Partner #1 listens for nonverbal body language, for tone of voice and for what is actually said. If you are really good, you can listen for emotions behind what is said and for what is not said. You want to hear and understand the whole package. Listen with your body and your eyes as well as your ears.

At breaks in the conversation, partner #1, can reflect back to partner #2 some of what he or she has said: "Let me see if I've got it. Is this what you are saying...."

Partner#2 then responds with agreement or with whatever adjustment is needed: "No, it was more like this...."

Partner #1 also needs to reflect the feelings he or she is hearing in the conversation. "You really seemed to enjoy doing that." "You felt really special then didn't you?" "That was frustrating wasn't it?"

Partner #2 responds with agreement or with adjustment until both partners hold the same information in common and partner #2 feels understood and known.

THEN SWITCH!

As you share, it may feel awkward at first. And you do not have to follow the above guidelines exactly. This is called active listening and is a powerful tool to make someone feel special and understood. It can be used anywhere with anyone at anytime.

As you share, note the very common barriers to listening that may crop up. Don't condemn each other, just take note and work on them. We are all guilty of them at times. They are as follows:

- Defensiveness - a "duologue" rather than a "dialogue." We are busy reacting rather than listening. We deny, justify, shift the blame, etc. Even if we don't verbally defend ourselves, we may be busy internally defending ourselves.
- Interrupting - be patient. Listen thoroughly to the end. Don't assume you know how this is going to turn out. Don't give in to the urge to talk. Don't offer advice on how to fix it unless asked.
- Giving too much information on too many topics at once - Ask the person speaking to give shorter "soundbites" so you are not overwhelmed and don't know what to respond to first.
- Internal Distractions - things on your mind can distract your attention.
- External Distractions - TV, kids, noise, etc.
- Mental and Physical Fatigue - You literally are too tired to listen.
- Negative Attitudes Toward Each Other - Set those aside for the evening. Our biases can color how and what we hear.
- Assuming You Already Know All There Is About Your Partner - We are always changing and growing and can be new to each other daily.
- Don't tell your spouse that they should feel differently than they do or that they should not feel the way they do.
- Don't judge what is important and what is not. If it is important to your spouse it is important to you also.
- Allow for disagreement. You can agree to disagree.
- Avoid using sarcasm or ridicule.
- Avoid the use of labels

Tell each other how it felt to be listened to tonight.

Say "Thank you" to each other.

Make a date to listen again next week.

Put November 21st on the calendar.

The topic will be "Becoming Each Other's Best Encourager."