

June 2009

The Therapeutic Value of Listening

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One of the most critical concepts we learn in CranioSacral Therapy (CST) is the importance of supporting the body's ability to self-correct. Dr. John Upledger teaches us about something he calls the "**I**nn**e**r **P**hys**i**c**i**an." This innate body intelligence knows precisely what it needs at any given moment to heal.

But to follow the guidance from that intelligence and support the body's self-corrective mechanisms, we must first learn to listen.

Indeed, over many years of practicing and teaching CST, I have come to believe that listening is the single most important skill you can develop to improve your therapy skills, your ability to palpate subtle movements of the craniosacral system, and your ability to help more clients relieve their pain and dysfunction.

When I talk about listening in the therapeutic sense, however, I don't just mean with your ears. I also mean listening with your hands and all of your other senses. It's true that the common definition of listening focuses on the sense of hearing. But think about what happens when we apply that same concept to the sense of touch.

Consider the following definition of *listen*, taken from Dictionary.com. Then see what happens when you substitute phrases and ideas that show you how the same concept applies to your tactile senses.

Listen - verb:

1. to give attention with the ear; attend closely for the purpose of hearing.
Substitute: to give attention with the *hands and tactile senses*; attend closely for the purpose of *feeling*.
2. to pay attention; heed; obey.
Substitute: to pay attention; heed; obey...*sensory information received through your hands*.
3. to wait attentively for a sound.
Substitute: to wait attentively for a *sensation*.

Notice the common word in all three of these definitions? It's "attention." Teachers and professionals in a wide variety of areas (i.e. leadership, management, conflict-resolution, etc.) often describe techniques like "focusing attention on" or "attending to the speaker fully" to be able to absorb the information being shared. They also describe specific tactics to improve listening, such as waiting for the speaker to finish, and listening without thinking about other things, formulating your response, or judging what the speaker is saying.

When you listen effectively and give your full attention to the speaker, you're not talking. You're receiving information. And in this information you'll discover what you need to know to respond appropriately. It is in this listening phase of communication that you can truly learn about the other person.

In the same way, when you touch a client's body, it wants to share information with you about its structure, function and health. Use your hands, and abide by the same guidelines you follow when you're listening effectively with your ears. By giving the body your full attention without doing other things, judging the information or formulating a response, you're able to more effectively hear what the body is saying to you. Then you can follow the body's lead and fully support your client's self-corrective healing process.
