



Mental Health Awareness Week
27 Sept – 3 Oct 2021

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You're not listening: What you're missing & why it matters

Murphy, K. (2020). Harvill Secker.

We all like to feel heard and understood. Kate Murphy's book explains why this is, and how taking time to listen to one another is beneficial for everyone. Listening is not as easy as it seems, especially in our increasingly fast paced world with our reliance on technology and social media. She notes it's hard to concentrate on the real world when you're preoccupied with the virtual one, where value is placed on what you project not what you absorb. In theory we have never been more connected, but in some cases we are lonelier, more isolated and less tolerant than ever before.

Her well-researched book reminds us of something we instinctively already know, the importance and value of listening.

"Everybody has something going on in their heads, whether it's your child, your romantic partner, your coworker, a client, or whoever. To listen well is to figure out what's on someone's mind and demonstrate you care enough to want to know. It's what we all crave; to be understood as a person with thoughts, emotions, and intents that are unique and valuable and deserving of attention."

She does not provide a how-to guide. Instead, she highlights different aspects of what makes a good listener, such as asking curious questions, not making assumptions, reading body language and nonverbal clues, being present, remaining open (even when you disagree with someone), listening fully (without interrupting), keeping on topic (don't derail the conversation), building trust, and being okay with silence.

"Hearing is passive. Listening is active. Understanding is the goal of listening, and it takes effort."

There were a couple of insights I will endeavour to apply to my everyday interactions. Murphy talks about *closeness-listening bias*, where we might use good listening skills in our professional lives but can be prone to making assumptions and misreading those closest to us.

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"When someone says something to you, it's as if they are tossing you a ball. Not listening or half listening is like keeping your arms pinned to your sides or looking away so the ball sails right past or bounces clumsily off you."

Another gem for me was the reminder that it is okay to listen to our gut instinct when the world becomes too noisy, negative or we are fatigued and to take a break from listening.

I recommend this book as a refresher and reminder of how simple, yet powerful, listening is. It's also equally important to be aware of when we are distracted. It encourages us to reflect on the quality of our listening skills and our willingness to be present for those in our lives. Listening well helps us and others feel connected, and can increase our chances of recognising when an acquaintance or friend is in need of a helping hand.

Reviewed by Kim Higginson, Information Management Specialist, MHF

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