



LISTEN & ENCOURAGE

How to be a better friend

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”
1 Thessalonians 5:11

1. **Listen first, and worry later about being heard yourself.** If someone senses you are not making the effort to listen or are not really interested in what they are saying, they will probably just stop talking to you. But if you make an effort to generally hear and understand, you will generate further conversation and a real connection.
2. **Practice ACTIVE listening.** People are like living, breathing books and at every turn, can offer gifts of their own knowledge and wisdom, sometimes from unexpected places. Nod, use strong eye contact, and affirmative words. Clarify through reflective listening: “So what you’re saying is....”
3. **In your next conversation, note any tendency on your part to drift away** while the other person is speaking. Catch yourself and focus your attention on their words.
4. **Practice active listening with the “YES, AND....”** technique. A useful technique of improvisational comedy is called “Yes, and.” It means that no matter what someone says during a sketch, you never deny the direction they are going. You support the conversation. For example, “This croissant is delicious...” ...” Using the “Yes, and...” technique means you reply with this: “Yes, and I have always wanted to learn how to bake croissants.” Suddenly you’re off and talking about croissants, baking, recipes, and maybe even France itself!
5. **Empathize.** Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes shows you really understand how it feels to be sad, ashamed, or in pain. Empathy helps the sufferer to feel less alone. When you have a problem, sharing it with a friend eases the burden.
6. **Be cautious with advice.** No matter how close the friendship, be careful about giving counsel. We tend to always want to fix things, but many times, we can’t fix things, no matter how much we want to. Advice giving can be difficult: if your friend takes your suggestions but the outcome isn’t positive, both of you will feel uncomfortable. If your advice is ignored, you may find yourself feeling offended. The best advice? Let your friends know you are always there to listen and if real advice is required, help them connect to a caring pastor, ministry leader, or professional counselor or health provider.

“A true friend is someone who thinks that you are a good egg even though he knows that you are slightly cracked” (*Bernard Meltzer*)

Susy Flory is a writer, speaker, and journalist who inspires and challenges people to embrace a life of passion, boldness, and adventure. The author of four books, including *Thunder Dog: The True Story of a Blind Man, His Guide Dog, and the Triumph of Trust at Ground Zero* (Thomas Nelson, 2011), Susy lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her husband and two kids. Visit Susy at www.susyflory.com.