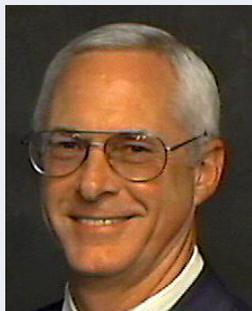


# Stonebriar Psychiatric Services News & Views

By Wendy Copeland, MA, LPC, ITC

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#### Services We Offer

Individual Therapy  
Marital / Couple's  
Family Therapy  
Relationship Counseling  
Personal Life Coaching  
Medication Management  
Speaking  
Evaluations/Assessments

## *Relational Hearing Impairment: Why I Can't Hear What You Have To Say*

By Wendy Copeland, MA, LPC, ITC



Truly LISTENING to one another can be hard. Even when loved ones *want* to hear each other, their defenses typically get in the way. We have this sort of relational hearing impairment; the kind that at times permits nothing in, at other times attends only to specific tones while deaf to others, and often lends distortion to the original message. What complicates this process even further is that the speakers themselves often start out defensive as well. So, what they say is not always what they truly mean. They, too, are afraid of getting hurt. The tragedy is that between their fears and the other's defensiveness, the reception and translation can be quite poor.

### *Relational Hearing Impairment & Levels of Intimacy and Dependency*

We all suffer from some degree of relational hearing impairment. Impairment tends to be related to several factors. Emotional interdependency, the high need for security, and the listener's personal emotional state are some contributors to relational hearing. With some people in our lives, we may hear and receive fairly clearly. These may include individuals that we experience as reliably emotionally safe. For example, I may have a family member who has *consistently* demonstrated love and good-will toward me. In such a relationship, I may have a very open heart and thus open ears. I may also have an open heart and open ears toward a dear friend whom I have come to know as loyal and caring. Interestingly, I may receive their words even clearer than my own family members because, although we are close, my sense of security does not lie with them. In contrast, my relationship with my partner, my mother, my father, my son, my daughter, my sister, or my brother may be characterized by more pronounced listening challenges. How my family perceives me and responds to me touches core levels of emotional security. They can deeply affect whether I feel accepted, loved, and valued. We can tend to be much more defended with family relationships, compared with our friends.

Another factor to consider is the listener's state of mind and emotional health. When I am tired, emotionally fatigued, or already struggling with insecurities, my ability to be open-hearted may be limited and quite temperamental. In our relationships, self-awareness of one's state of being is crucial. Many times, we blame someone else for being too critical, unloving, or disrespectful, when in reality we may just be overly taxed and hypersensitive. Taking ownership of this when it is the case can be immensely helpful in the relationship.

### *Relational Hearing Impairment: Addressing our Fears, Feelings, and Beliefs*

Relational hearing loss can take place when our fears, feelings, and beliefs are activated in the course of communicating. Many times, hearing loss strikes when we desperately want to avoid or disperse a fear, feeling, or belief that is painful and threatening to the relationship. Many difficult feelings lie within us, just beneath the surface and easily triggered by a word, a look, or even a tone of voice. The following are some examples of how private fears, feelings, and beliefs cause people to stop listening and instead become defensive in relationship:

**Treatment for**

Depression  
Anxiety / Panic Attacks  
Eating Disorders  
Bi-polar Disorder  
Obsessive –  
Compulsive  
Disorder  
Compulsive Behaviors  
such as sexual  
addiction  
Post-traumatic Stress  
Disorder from past  
abuse  
Ryotional issues  
Adjustment to life  
changes

**Ages Served**

Adult  
Adolescent  
Children ages 10 & up



*“I feel unacceptable, and your face and words tell me that you do not accept me either.”*

*“I am ashamed and your words point to my inadequacies. I can’t live in shame, so I will strike out angrily at you. The worst part about that is that I will push you away even more, and confirm once again my belief that deep down you don’t love me.”*

*“Your words may reveal a truth about me that I can’t handle.”*

*“I am afraid that when you ask to talk, it is really about me. I am never good enough and I can’t hear that again from you. I stonewall or strike back to avoid feeling never good enough and like I’ve failed again.”*

*“If we talk again, and I try to listen, but it doesn’t work – then I will feel hopeless about us. It is less painful to avoid talking than to have it go badly and feel despair. I do not know what to do when we get to despair.”*

*“If I let you continue any further, your words will confirm my fears. When I leave you, I am not trying to get away from you; I am just leaving the pain.”*

Ultimately, threatening feelings, fears and beliefs alert us to the possibility of rejection. If rejection were like an umbrella, underneath its canopy would include the most wounding of feelings: inadequate, unloveable, unworthy, unacceptable, and shameful. When we were young, we experienced and struggled with one or more of these feelings. We developed coping strategies to defend against the rejecting pain. Unfortunately, the very strategies that protect us also tend to alienate us from the intimacy for which we desperately yearn. As we learn how to talk safely with one another, we begin the path towards healing those wounds. In the presence of safety and love, the heart opens and the ears are free to receive. Then, healing within.

**Listening Path**

*~~~~~*

*I know I need to hear you, I know that you have much to say*

*I know that my heart needs to meet with yours in a new and different way*

*So that I can receive you, and the gift that is mine to have*

*If only I could listen and walk with you along the path*

*~~~~~*

*But every time I hear a tone, see a certain look, or hear those piercing words*

*-I begin to hurt*

*And fear sets in that you don't truly love me or that I am unworthy of your love*

*And that possibility is too painful and I become undone*

*~~~~~*

*I know I need to hear you, I know that you have much to say*

*I know that my heart needs to mend with yours in a new and different way*

*So that we receive the gift, that is ours to have*

*We can learn to listen, my heart with yours along this path*

*~~~~~*

*-W. Copeland, 2012*



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