

Learning to *listen*

Sarah

We all know what it's like to get a phone call in the middle of the night. Thoughts full of panic filled my sleep-dazed mind as I grabbed the receiver. My heart was pounding as I said hello. I gripped the phone tighter and eyed my husband, who was now turning to face my side of the bed.

"Mama?" the voice answered. I could hardly hear the whisper but my thoughts immediately went to my daughter. When the desperate sound of a young crying voice became clear on the line, I grabbed for my husband and squeezed his wrist.

"Mama, I know it's late. But don't say anything until I finish. Yes, I've been drinking. And I got so scared. I want to come home. I know running away was wrong."

Sobs of deep-felt emotion poured into my heart. Immediately I pictured my daughter's face in my mind, and before I could start, she pleaded in desperation.

"No! Please let me finish!" I paused and tried to think what to say. Before I could go on, she continued. "I'm pregnant, Mama. I know I shouldn't be drinking now ... especially now, but I'm really scared, Mama! Please don't hang up on me. I feel so alone."

The voice broke again, and I bit into my lip, feeling my own eyes fill with moisture.

"I'm here, I wouldn't hang up," I said. "I know I should have told you, Mama. But, when we talk, you just keep telling me what I should do. You don't listen to me and you never let me tell you how I feel. You read all those pamphlets on how to talk with your children, but all you do is talk. You always think you have all the answers. But sometimes I just want someone to listen."

I swallowed the lump in my throat and stared at the how-to-talk-to-your-kids pamphlets scattered on my nightstand. "I'm listening," I whispered.

"You know, after I had got the car under control, I started thinking about the baby. Then I saw this phone booth and it was as if I could hear you preaching to me how people shouldn't drink and drive. So I called a taxi. I want to come home. But you know, I think I can drive now."

"No!" I snapped. My muscles stiffened and I tightened the clasp on my husband's hand. "Please wait for the taxi, don't hang up on me until the taxi gets there."

I listened to the silence, fearing. When I didn't hear her answer, I bit into my lip and closed my eyes. Somehow I had to stop her from driving. Suddenly, she continued, "There's the taxi now and I'm coming home, Mama." There was a click, and the phone went silent.

Moving from the bed, tears forming in my eyes, I went to stand in my 14 year old daughter's room. My husband came from behind and asked, "Did she know she had dialed the wrong number?"

I replied calmly, "My dear, this may not be a wrong number." We went closer to the bed of our daughter and I sat down on it. This woke our daughter up. She asked, "What are you two doing here in the middle of the night?" I gave her an immediate answer, "Practicing!" She seemed to be so curious and continued, "What are you practicing then?" "To be a good listener!" was my only reply.

