

# When You Are Being “Talked At”

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When someone is talking longer than you enjoy and you wonder if they even know you are there, you might say you are being talked at rather than having a conversation. Often being talked at means finding a way out or just bearing it until the situation changes. It's helpful to have more than of these two strategies. You would like to be able to take care of yourself in these situations with some ease.

One gem reader, I will call her Carol, gave an example of her own struggle with her father-in-law:

"He launches into a 30-minute monologue about his back pain and doesn't take any social cues that I'm not listening anymore, or that I'm hurt that he interrupted me, or that I'm disappointed that he doesn't show any interest in me, only in himself. I just don't have the courage to bust out at the dinner table with saying something like "You know Jon, I noticed that you interrupted me and then talked continuously for 30 min without noticing my boredom. I feel hurt and disconnected and would like to have a conversation that is shared equally and would like for you to show some genuine interest. Would you be willing to listen to me too?"

Perhaps the first thing to consider in situations like these is how much energy you want to invest in the relationship. For example, if Carol rarely sees her father-in-law, maybe she will choose to simply avoid him. If, however, he is regularly in her life she may need another strategy to take care of herself in the face of his behavior.

Taking care of yourself could begin with self-empathy. If you have judgments of the other person, you can use these to find your feelings and needs. Judgments are a tragic expression of your own feelings and needs. In our example with Carol, she might have the following judgments: "He's so selfish. He just wants everything to be about him." "He's so oblivious to other's needs." Looking through the feelings and needs a list, Carol might identify that behind these judgments are feelings of anger, hurt, and disconnect and needs for being seen and heard, mutuality, and consideration.

After connecting with your feelings and needs, the next step is grieving that your needs are not met. This helps you move into acceptance around what is happening. Grieving often involves being able to clearly name what you wish was happening and then clearly name what is happening and then sit quietly and notice what arises without proliferating thoughts. Receiving empathy from others is likely the most reliable strategy to open the door to grief and acceptance.

When you have found acceptance of the situation as it is, you are ready to broaden your perspective and stretch into empathy for the other person. When faced with behaviors that don't really meet needs, it's helpful to ask what needs that person could be trying to meet and how they could have arrived at such a behavior? The possible answers to these questions aren't

nearly as important as asking them. Just asking them helps you relax the tension around your heart.

If Carol, in our example, were to stretch into curiosity and empathy for her father-in-law, her guesses about his experience could start just in her own mind. Here guesses might sound like this:

- Maybe he grew up in a family where he had to be the biggest and loudest to get his needs met.
- Maybe the ways he learned to communicate in his family are so ineffective that he chronically alienates others and thus his needs for being seen and heard are usually unmet.
- Maybe he has a need for acceptance.

The point here is not for Carol to analyze her father-in-law, but rather to recognize that there is more to him than the monologue behavior.

Going through this process will naturally lead to considering what action you would like to take. In our example, Carol might come up with the following possibilities:

- She might decide that doesn't want to invest energy in this relationship and keep interactions short and infrequent.
- She could take care of her needs up front by asking for his assurance that he really wants to listen. For example, if Jon asks her how school is going, she could say something like: "Okay I would like to tell you three things about school, would you really like to hear them? Okay, let me say all three though. One is..."
- She could frame Jon's talking as an opportunity to practice empathy by interrupting him frequently: "Jon, Jon, hang on I want to see if I am hearing you so far. It sounds like..."
- She could silently empathize with herself and/or Jon as he talks.
- She could approach Jon when he is not in a monologue and they have a moment of privacy and try honest expression. Perhaps something like, "Hey Jon I notice when we talk that I am wanting to share more with you so we can grow closer (needs for expression & intimacy). When I am sharing something could you ask me more questions about it?"

Coming up with possibilities like these are difficult when you are still caught in judgment, anger, and other forms of resistance to what's happening. From an open-hearted place of self-connection, situations that once seemed like impossible traps become places of discernment and choice.

## Practice

Take a moment now to identify a judgment you have had recently about someone. Take a look at the feelings and needs list and identify what feelings and needs that judgment is attempting to express.