

TEXT 1

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NPR

To give better advice, try less fixing and more listening

Transcript:

MEREDITH GOLDSTEIN: As a professional advice-giver, I help a lot of people with their problems in real life and online. But one question that's always hard to answer is, how do you give advice? Like, what makes a person good at giving advice to others? We all wind up being called on for advice by the people in our lives – our friends, family, our significant others – and it doesn't always go well. If you say the wrong thing to a friend, it might strain the relationship. Tell your girlfriend what to do and she might tell you where you can go.

But I want to start by going to the person I've always thought of as a natural advice-giver. She's been listening to me talk about my problems, on and off, for almost forever.

JAIME ROBERTS: Hi. I'm Jaime Roberts, and I am a high school guidance counselor outside of Boston. And I have known Mer since middle school.

GOLDSTEIN: When we were kids, Jaime was that girl you could talk to if you were upset – the one you could cry to in the bathroom, the one who never made you feel bad for having a feeling. She was an old soul, an unselfish listener.

ROBERTS: I want to make sure that I look open to the person, where my hands are visible.

GOLDSTEIN: Her openness isn't just about her attitude. Apparently, I also trust her because of her body language and her game¹ face. And that's Takeaway One – body language matters.

When I think about you and how you compose yourself, there's always, like, a calmness and a thoughtfulness and a very even² expression. So what are the ways that someone can sort of check themselves and their reactions when they're hearing somebody's problems?

ROBERTS: Just to be natural and – so I'm calming that person, more open to give advice because if you look like you're tense or you're distracted, the person might not open up to you as much as you would want them to.

¹ (her) fokuserede

² ligevægtigt

25 GOLDSTEIN: Jaime says people show openness in different ways. Eye contact is easy for some, but not for others. She actually gets cold a lot. So sometimes she just lets someone know, hey, my arms are crossed because I'm freezing in Boston, not because I'm judging you.

GOLDSTEIN: So what are some of the mistakes somebody might make when they're listening, with their body or their face?

30 ROBERTS: Yeah. Making a face, or like, oh, my God – you know, just kind of shock value – when they hear a situation that they haven't heard before. I think I try to take some deep breaths and sit back and be aware, and be mindful of my body at times.

35 GOLDSTEIN: The next person I talked to about this also believes in the importance of the body as it connects to the advice-giving mind. Khalid Latif is an imam and the executive director³ and chaplain⁴ for the Islamic Center at New York University. Part of Khalid's job is counseling a lot of people. He says of body language, it's probably not good if you're holding a phone.

KHALID LATIF: I would say a few things to not do is to not be engaged in anything electronic, not looking at a phone. Somebody's calling you, just let it ring and stop. If someone's opening up and making themselves vulnerable, you want to let them know that they are your sole focal point.

40 GOLDSTEIN: But Khalid's big tip about advice is to know what it is. It's not about coming up with some magic solution and commanding it. Even as a spiritual counselor, he knows that no one is coming to him for one final answer. Maybe they want a mirror, to be heard, to have a witness as they work it out. Don't feel pressure to give the one perfect answer. And that's Takeaway Two – people aren't necessarily asking you to fix it.

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³ *executive director*: administrerende direktør

⁴ (her) tilknyttet religiøs rådgiver