

STOP, LOOK and then LISTEN

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STOP, LOOK and then LISTEN

By Valerie Harker

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About 2 years ago my mother was making regular visits to a podiatrist for an annoying epidemic of corns on the bottom of her feet. During her course of treatment she began to notice that the bottom of her right big toe had a slightly dark discoloration that was not apparent in any other place on her toes or feet. She asked the podiatrist for his opinion during one of her visits to his office. He had never seen anything like this before and, as he would later admit, actually believed that the bottom of my mother's foot was dirty or stained. Because it did not cause any discomfort and because of the podiatrist's lack of concern she decided that her foot was completely normal. But she continued to observe the stain and she was troubled by the fact that it would never go away. Some time later she fell down some stairs during a stay at a summer cabin. She badly injured her leg in her fall and when her holiday was over she visited her family doctor for a diagnosis. She took this opportunity to show him the discolored skin on her foot. Fortunately for my mother, this doctor was far more curious than the podiatrist. He was fairly certain that my glamorous and well-groomed mother did not have grimy stains on the bottom of her feet. He had never seen anything like this but suspected that it might be melanoma. He promptly sent her to a plastic surgeon, hoping that he would identify the mysterious condition that was turning darker and beginning to slowly spread.

In the end my mother's instinctive concern and her family doctor's curiosity saved her foot, and possibly her life. Unfortunately she was not able to keep her big toe. The dark stain was eventually diagnosed as a very rare form of melanoma. After several biopsies and surgeries it became clear that the cancer had moved from the bottom of her toe to the sides and eventually onto the top, and deeper into the dermis. In an attempt to save her toe she went through 8 different surgeries where an increasing portion of her skin and bone was sliced away followed by lab work to determine if any cancer still remained. After one month in the hospital, she went home and traded all her trendy and strappy, open toed shoes for some very sensible (and not very trendy) oxfords. She was very thankful that she could still walk and that her condition had been arrested. She was very disappointed that she had not trusted the voice in her heart that knew that something was wrong choosing instead to listen to the supposed voice of experience and expertise.

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This year nearly 8 thousand Americans will die from melanoma. This is a tragic statistic because melanoma, when identified early, can be treated in a simple office procedure. When people are vigilant and carefully observe marks, moles and unusual skin conditions they can alert their doctor as soon as anything abnormal is detected. On the other hand, if a melanoma is given time to penetrate deeper into the skin and to gain access to the blood supply, the prognosis is very, very poor. Untreated melanoma is a killer.

No professional knows your body as well as you. That is why every person should develop a routine of watching for bumps and moles. The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends a full-body self-examination every three months. Here is their handy A-B-C-D (Assymetry, Borders, Color and Diameter) checklist to help you monitor all your marks and moles.

You will need a full length mirror and a hand-held mirror in a room with very good lighting. Spot your marks and moles and become familiar with them. Watch for any changes using the following checklist:

Assymetry Both sides of the mole have a uniform shape.

Border The edges of a mole should be smooth and not blurred or ragged.

Color. Tan, brown and dark brown are normal colors for moles. A very dark mole or one that has changed color is not normal. Red, white, blue and black are not normal colors for moles.

Diameter Be suspicious of moles that are larger than 1/4 of an inch in diameter or ones that are increasing in size.

In short, watch your "spots" and listen to those sometimes annoying voices inside your head. An over active sixth sense has alerted many "would be" cancer victims to trouble which has ultimately prevented serious consequences. If you do spot something that looks suspicious, do not allow denial to stop you. Of course, and thankfully, not every lump and bump will be potentially malignant. But, if your doctor is alerted, he or she along with you, can begin to monitor any changes over time. Finally, make sure that you are confident in your doctor's diagnostic capacity. You should not discount a professional who can not diagnose something upon first glance. But, you should rejoice if you find that you are in the care of one who believes, "When in doubt, check it out!" and promptly sends you off to another professional for a second opinion.

Today, cancer is a very real and very nasty part of our reality. It will affect you or someone close to you at some point in this life journey. It is vitally important to realize that every person can take steps to facilitate early diagnosis. While this will not always guarantee a cancer free life, it certainly is a great asset in the fight against a very real killer.

Valerie Harker graduated from the University of Alberta with a BED. Melanoma is a skin disease that has run in Valerie's family and has opened her eyes to the need for education and preventive treatment in skin care. For more information you can visit her site at:

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<http://www.dna-repair-solutions.com>

Stop, Look, Listen! Steps to Better Parenting Communication

By Rachel Webb

As a parent it seems that the majority of your day is spent trying to get your children to listen to what you are trying to teach them. Make them understand how to be a responsible child. Convince them to make the right choices. Kids call these lectures. Some parents call them friendly reminders or teaching opportunities.

Dean Rusks said, "One of the best ways to persuade others— is with your ears!" There are three steps that may help you to remember to use better listening skills can help you achieve more effective communication with your child. Just three small words. Stop. Look. Listen.

STOP what you are doing. Put your child on your lap or sit beside them so you are at their eye level. This tells your child that they are important and that they now have your full attention.

LOOK your child in the eye. Maintaining good eye contact during a conversation is a good way to recognize important non-verbal behavior. Your child's posture, body movements and gestures can tell parents a lot about how their child is feeling.

LISTEN and really hear what your child is saying. You can give your child clues that you are listening by nodding, smiling or raising your eyebrows. These kind of communication signals will encourage your child to open up to you and feel they are being understood.

Randall A. Wright gives a parenting test in his book *Building Better Homes and Families*. See how you rate.

Do You look at your children when listening to them?

Are you trying to understand how your children feel instead of thinking how you feel about what they are telling you?

Do you raise your voice in anger at your children who interrupt you while on the phone or when you are visiting with guests in your home?

Do you listen patiently to all that your children have to say before you start talking?

Are you truly interested in what your children tell you?

Do you expect your children to stop what they are doing and listen when you need to tell them something?

Do you stop what you are doing when your children have something important to tell you?

STOP, LOOK and then LISTEN

Do you listen in a way that encourages your children to express their real feelings?

Do you listen with affection to your children?

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