

## Just Listen-by Stacy G. York, LCSW

Young people store so much in their hearts. I have the opportunity to be trusted with some of this. I did a girls group recently and asked the question, "What in your life do you think your parents will never be able to understand?" I wasn't sure what to expect for answers, but I was blown away. Here are their responses: "My parents will never know what it's like to go to a psych center every time you feel angry. My parents will never know what it's like to be the daughter of a drug addict or alcoholic. My grandparents will never know what it's like to have your mom die and be raised by grandparents." These girls have deep wounds in their souls. I often wonder, how would the lives of these girls be different if their caregivers knew, and understood, what was in their hearts? Sometimes I get so sad because their parents also hold deep wounds in their souls. Until we see our own wounds, we cannot identify others or even begin to understand theirs. This group of girls taught me a huge lesson that day. We spend so much time trying to teach kids "the difference between right and wrong" that sometimes we just need to zip our lips and listen to what our children have to say. Hear what they are thinking about. I presented a challenge to 5 of the parents I work with. I said, "I challenge you each to spend 10 minutes at the end of the day just listening to your child talk about whatever they want to. Ask them thought provoking questions if you'd like, but sit and just listen. No opinionated response, no judgment. Just listen. Come back to me in one week and tell me what you heard." Three of the parents accepted the challenge. All three came back and reported, "My child told me more in that 10 minutes than I have heard in years." All three parents had reports of conversations that they could not have imagined-questions about the universe, spirituality, relationships, how to love, what to do if there's a natural disaster. This mini-challenge taught me, as well as the parents, that our youth today are faced with so much stress. They are scared to talk about it. We have to open our ears and help them through it. I have a teenager that I see on a regular basis. Within a month of knowing him, she states, "My parents basically pay you to listen to me for an hour a week because they don't have the time to do it themselves." During our session, her dad sits in the waiting room and waits for her. In an attempt to address this with the parent, he became defensive and left the session early. This particular youth just wants an adult who will listen to all her dreams and ideas no matter how wild or unrealistic they are. Most adults that I see want the same thing, for someone to listen to them. Just listen!