

A Truth About Listening

Children learn when they are able to listen; they listen best when they feel heard

1. Find a private place. Take children aside in a tactful way.
2. Be interested. Many listening problems vanish when we have an open and interested attitude.
3. Get rid of distractions, like noise or objects in your hand. Distractions dilute our ability to be present.
4. Use body language. Be alert, make eye contact, lean forward or put yourself on the same level physically with younger children.
5. STOP TALKING! The more we talk, the less listening we do
6. Listen to understand, not just for the sake of it.
7. Acknowledge how children feel... *non-verbally* with nods, smiles, etc. OR with simple statements. Examples:
 - i. "You look pretty angry, Sally."
 - ii. "Tommy, you sound hurt that you were left out."
 - iii. "I can tell from your face that you are sad."
8. Validate feelings. Let children know it's not wrong, but even normal to feel the way they do. Validating feelings simply means that what we feel is OK. What we *do* with feelings is another matter. Examples:
 - i. "You know, a lot of children feel a little nervous at first."
 - ii. "I understand that you're angry."
 - iii. "I'd be hurt, too. Let's think about what to do next. "
9. Ask. Many children are not used to being heard. Reassure them of your interest. Invite them to share. Be careful not to ask questions that are put downs or embarrassments. Examples:
 - i. "You look upset Joey. Can you tell me what happened?"
10. Keep focused. If children have trouble staying on track, help them out.
 - i. "Let's go back to what you were saying before."
11. Invite Reflection. Children often have ideas about what might help them. Encourage them to give you *their* ideas. Examples:
 - i. "Do you have any ideas that might help?"
 - ii. "What do you think we can do to figure this out together?"
12. Share your own experience, but keep it simple. Oversharing can make them feel responsible for taking care of your feelings. Examples of simple statements:
 - i. "You know, I also miss my Mom sometimes."
 - ii. "Something like this happened to me once."
13. Give credit to children when they are able to share, trust, be honest or be open. They also need credit when they own their mistakes or their part of a problem. Catch them exhibiting great behavior! Examples:
 - i. "I know this is hard, but you're doing great."
 - ii. "You're being honest and that's important."

*Guard against jumping to conclusions instead of listening.
Being critical or moralizing usually shuts children down,
not opens them up.*