

SAFEGUARDING

Components of Good Communication

Listening Skills

An essential part of the communication exchange with your child is receiving messages from them. They can be verbal messages (questions, requests) or non-verbal ones (actions or non-actions). Listening is a learned skill, and with effort we can become better at it. In the process we will be setting a good example for the children, and they will become better listeners too.



Active listening is the central component of communication. When you become an active listener, you are telling your child that the channels of communication are open.

You are recognising that your child has a need and/or a desire to share her feelings and thoughts, and that you are receptive.

There are several skills and techniques involved in active listening that will decrease the likelihood that you will be judgmental or critical, or will lecture or belittle.

These skills allow you to help your child get in touch with what they are really feeling and thinking, analyse it, and put it in perspective so that problems do not seem bigger than they really are.

It will also build a bond between you and your child, and make them more receptive to what is on *your* mind.

To become an active listener:

- Set aside time to listen. Block out distractions as much as possible. In order to hear and understand what your child has to say, you have to want to do so, and want to help your child with any concerns she has at the moment. Some parents and children find they can communicate best just before bedtime or when they share an evening snack.
- Put aside your own thoughts and viewpoints, and place yourself in a frame of mind to receive information from your child. Give them your complete attention, and try to put yourself in their place so you can better understand what they are experiencing. Make them feel that you value their thoughts and consider them important, and that you are sensitive to their point of view.
- Listen to, summarise, and repeat back to your child the message you are hearing. This is called reflective listening. When appropriate, gently state what you think they may be trying to say. Do not just parrot what you hear, but go beneath the surface to what your child may be thinking and feeling. Remember, the spoken words may not be the true or complete message. The underlying messages may include the feelings, fears, and concerns of your child. Assign these feelings a name or label ("It sounds to me as if you are scared... sad...angry...happy").
- Maintain eye contact while your child talks. Show your interest by nodding your head and occasionally interjecting "door-openers" or noncommittal responses like "Yes...I see...Oh...How about that." Encourage them to keep talking. Although these may seem like passive responses, they are an important part of communication.
- Accept and show respect for what your child is expressing, even if it does not coincide with your own ideas and expectations. You can do this by paying attention to what your child is

communicating, while not criticising, judging, or interrupting.

- Create opportunities for your child to solve the problems they may be facing. Encourage and guide them. Ask them to bounce ideas off you, which might eventually suggest solutions to problems.

When parents are active listeners, other people may describe them as having good intuition and as being "tuned in" to their children. The process of active listening will help your child understand their feelings and be less afraid of the negative ones. It will build bridges and create warmth between you and your child. It will also help them solve her own problems and gain more control over their behaviour and emotions, and if your child sees you as an active listener, this will make them more willing to listen to you and to others.

You can monitor how actively you are listening by watching for cues that you are not listening well. If you find yourself feeling bored by the conversation, distracted, looking around or away, or feeling rushed, or if you feel that you are wasting time, you are not listening actively.

Even when you think you and your child are doing a good job of listening and communicating, it is a good idea to test that impression occasionally. You can ask them to repeat as best they can what you have been trying to say - either the words or the feelings. Similarly, you should try to summarise and restate what it is that you heard them say.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

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