

Active listening

In order to listen effectively to your child and encourage communication, active listening skills are needed.

To actively listen to what children have to say, the listener should:

1. Reflect back what the child is saying.
2. Focus on the child and maintain eye contact when they are talking to you.
3. Accept what the child is saying. Draw out ideas and feelings by asking questions and helping examine the situation fully.

For example –

“Tom wouldn’t let me play with him today.”

“Your friend Tom from school wouldn’t play with you? It sounds like you are pretty upset. What happened?”

“What do you think you can do about this?”

- Remain interested and attentive to your child, forget about the telephone and turn off the television, show your child that you are really interested in what they have to say.
- Encourage your child to talk; your child is more likely to talk to you if they feel that you are interested.
- Be patient when you are listening. Children can often take longer than adults to find the right words. Listen to your child and let them know that you have plenty of time.
- Listen to all that your child has to say. Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking, It is easy to come to a conclusion or reject a child’s view before they have finished. You may find it difficult to listen respectfully and not correct their misconceptions, but respect your child’s right to have, and express, their own opinions.
- Look at your child’s body language and facial expressions. Many messages that your child is trying to communicate will be in their tone of voice, facial expressions, their energy level, their posture or changes in their behavioural patterns. If your child comes in and they are obviously upset but do not want to communicate with you verbally, be sure to find some quiet time, then or later on, in order to encourage them to talk to you about what is upsetting them.