



Parenting Tips

PARENTS CAN BECOME ACTIVE LISTENERS

"My kid won't listen!" is a familiar refrain among parents, but how many parents are good listeners themselves? Some parents believe they are good listeners, but their responses are often loaded with criticism, lectures, commands, questions and sermons.

A better way to communicate is through active listening, a process that shows:

- ☞ You understand the child's words
- ☞ You understand the child's feelings in the situation
- ☞ You accept his words and feelings in a non-judgmental way

Comments like, "Don't feel that way," and "You don't really mean that" are certain communication stoppers. To let children know they're accepted and valued choose reflective responses rather than judgmental ones. Consider the difference between these two approaches when a seven-year old comes home from school looking disheartened with slumped shoulders and says, "Rachel and I had a fight."

Judgmental Response--Parent says, "Well, it's not that bad," (discounting the way the child feels) then adds, "You shouldn't fight. You know better."

Reflective Response--Parent says, "You look so sad" and pauses. Child replies, "Well, she called me bad names," to which the parent responds, "You're really feeling miserable and upset with Rachel. Want to talk about it?" Reflective responding shows your interest in your children's ideas and your acceptance of their feelings. The following ways to respond encourage sharing of ideas and feelings, and open the door to further discussion.

- ☞ Invite your child to talk to you. Respond to your child's opening remark by saying, "Let's talk about it" or "You have a right to express how you feel."
- ☞ Ask open-ended questions that encourage children to share their feelings and ideas. Ask "What did you do in school today?" instead of "Did school go well today?"
- ☞ Help children identify their feelings. Describe your own feelings. Instead of saying "I'm upset," say "I'm feeling sad and discouraged because I didn't get the job."
- ☞ Talk about things of interest to your children. You can gain a new understanding into the world of your pre-teen or teenager.
- ☞ Choose topics that everyone can talk about. Talking about the "scariest moment I ever had" or "what I want to be when I grow up" fosters involvement.
- ☞ Spend time having fun together. You may have to re-order your priorities and drop some commitments that take time away from the family.

By being honest about your own feelings and listening to your children, you can reduce misunderstanding and develop a closeness based on trust and acceptance.

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