

Listen. *Just* listen.

Quick tips to help you really listen



There is decades of evidence that shows that listening is the most helpful first step in supporting a child with intense emotions. Listening is an important skill for parents/ caregivers, but it doesn't always come easily. Here are some quick tips to help you really listen:

1. Put distractions aside

Stop what you're doing, turn the TV off, put your phone down. If your children is voicing concerns about their emotions and/distress, you need to take the opportunity as it presents – this can't be scheduled for later.

2. Eye contact

Be guided by your child. Too little can come across as uncaring. Too much can come across as intimidating. If they are looking at you, look at them. If they are looking away, look away.

3. Body language

Avoid crossing arms and crossing legs. Leaning slightly forward or sideways can show that you are listening – as can a slight tilt of your head or resting your head on your hand.

4. Listen to non-verbal clues

Facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures reveal a lot. Is your child rubbing their eyes because they're upset or are they tired? Are they having trouble sitting or standing still because they are angry? Is their low voice suggesting they are sad or defeated?

5. Listen without judging or jumping to conclusions

All emotions are an opportunity for connection!

6. Don't start planning what to say next

Listen. Just listen.

7. Ask open ended questions

Open ended questions are ok when your child pauses or there is a large gap in the conversation (silence is totally ok too!). An example is 'how did you feel when X did Y?' Closed questions usually require a yes or no answer and tend to close conversation.

8. Don't push your ideas or solutions

The children and young people we spoke to clearly expressed this. They simply want you to listen. Helping your child label their emotions (e.g. 'I'm feeling sad'), can help, but check with them if you have it right.

9. Listening can happen anywhere

At the basketball hoop, on the way to school, in the park, brushing teeth before bed – it doesn't have to be structured or planned.

10. Avoid finishing sentences for your child

Sit in silence and give them space to construct the sentence themselves.

11. Ask your child what help they'd like

This could be from you or someone else or you can also ask what you can do next.

12. Circle back and check in with your child after your discussion

Ongoing conversation is the best way to show children that you care about their emotions and supporting them.