

Ways of Listening

Here are some tips on improving our listening to children. Listening well can be difficult, so these tips are ideas to help. Which **one** or **two** ways of improving your listening appeal to you?

Paying Attention

Children can sense when our attention is genuine. Try to take some time out to *notice* your child and to pay attention to what she is doing or saying – especially when she is not demanding attention. If children only get attention when misbehaving, they are likely to use misbehaviour as a way of getting attention.

Eye Listening

Your eyes are usually more important than your ears for listening. It helps to get down to the same eye-level and see what your child is feeling. How do *you* feel when someone listens to you without looking at you?

Touch Listening

A parent touching, cuddling or hugging him will often help a young child to express feelings more fully, including fears, affection, anger, tears, and lots of other feelings he can't put into words.

Play Listening

A child thrives on good attention – not just when she is upset. Play listening means giving her good attention and a sense of being “noticed”, partly by silently watching her play, and partly by saying what you see her doing. *“Mm, you’ve put the doll sitting up there...” “Ah, you found the right place.” “Mm, you’ve used three of them now...”*

Silence

You may have to bite your tongue in order not to argue or reason with an upset child. An upset child usually doesn't want to hear explanations, however reasonable – he may just want to be unreasonable, to scream and rage and say how unfair everything is! Only when he gets that all off his chest will he be open to listening to you.

Single Words

Sometimes, one or two words may be enough to give your child a sense that you're listening and that you understand. *“Mm” “Oh” “Really?” “I see” “Oh no!”* But a child will know if you are just going through the motions and not really listening.

Repeating

Repeating a few of your child's words, or summing up what she said, perhaps after a pause, can also let her know that you are paying attention and you understand. "Oh dear! Your lovely tricycle!" "So that's what you're going to do today". That may encourage her to say more.

Reflecting Feelings

Notice what your child is *feeling* and checking that out with him can help him to become *aware* of his feelings. "So you're **sad** it's broken." "You're **angry** I won't let you do that." "You sound **pleased** that your granny's coming."

These are all examples of how we can acknowledge a child's feelings and give them a vocabulary to help them describe their own feelings.