

The Parents Corner

♥We're in Your Corner♥

Active Listening

We put a pretty huge emphasis on showing acts of love in our society—grand gestures, gifts, elaborate showing of affection. When it comes right down to it, there's a simpler way to show your child that you love them—it's free, it takes a minimal amount of time, and you don't have to include anyone else or make anything. It's called active listening, and it is quite powerful.

Our worlds are busy, and it can sometimes feel like our little people are taking up A LOT of our time and space in addition to all the other things we have going on in life. BUT, as tempting as it can be to rush through a conversation or brush off a problem, our kids are trying to share with us (especially when it's been a long, bad, or busy day), and they need to know that we are listening to them. *Really* listening to them.

Often times, we find that when a child feels misunderstood or unheard, their emotions escalate and so do behaviors. Active listening is another tool for your toolbox for combatting those feelings and helping your child know you're on their team. By actively listening, you are communicating that they are worthy of your attention. By taking time to hear what they have to say, you are demonstrating that their view of the world has merit. By allowing them the time to work through their struggle without jumping in and giving your advice or opinion, you are showing your trust in their ability to solve problems.

When it comes to modeling what it's like to be an active listener, there are just a few things to remember: Give your full attention to your child. Make eye contact and stop whatever you are doing. Get down on their level if possible. And repeat back what you heard them say to make sure you understand. It sounds like a lot, but it can do wonders for your relationship, your connection, and their self-esteem. Listening to the little stuff now makes it more likely they will come to us with the big stuff later. So...are you listening?

1. **Reflect.** Reflection is one way for you to show you are actively listening to your child. You don't have to repeat exactly what they said, but you want to let them know that you are listening and trying to understand them. If you misunderstood in any way, this allows for time to confirm that you understand each other.
2. **Accept.** This is not the time to object, teach, help solve a problem, or ask a ton of questions. This is a time to demonstrate acceptance and let your children talk without interruptions or judgment, while you listen to what they have to say.
3. **Empathize.** Although the situation being discussed may not seem like a big deal to you, your child's perception of the situation is very real to them. Giving them a chance to not only disclose their thoughts and feelings but also have a safe adult letting them know that you can understand where they are coming from can help them de-escalate and focus on solutions.
4. **Model.** As always, you are your child's model of behavior. Showing them how to take time to communicate and take time to listen can help their communication skills flourish and carry over into other relationships they have with peers and adults.

~If you continue to have concerns, contact your school counselor to make a plan for a success—they're full of ideas, and are always in your corner!~