

Actively Listening to your Child

Communicating with our children can be a difficult task at times. We feel like they're not listening to us; they feel like we're not listening to them. Good listening and communications skills are essential to successful parenting. Your child's feelings, views and opinions have worth, and you should make sure you take the time to sit down and listen openly and discuss them honestly.

It seems to be a natural tendency to react rather than to respond. We pass judgment based on our own feelings and experiences. However, responding means being receptive to our child's feelings and emotions and allowing them to express themselves openly and honestly without fear of repercussion from us. By reacting, we send our child the message that their feelings and opinions are invalid. But by responding and asking questions about why the child feels that way, it opens a dialog that allows them to discuss their feelings further, and allows you a better understanding of where they're coming from. Responding also gives you an opportunity to work out a solution or a plan of action with your child that perhaps they would not have come up with on their own. Your child will also appreciate the fact that maybe you do indeed understand how they feel.

It's crucial in these situations to give your child your full and undivided attention. Put down your newspaper, stop doing dishes, or turn off the television so you can hear the full situation and make eye contact with your child. Keep calm, be inquisitive, and afterwards offer potential solutions to the problem.

Don't discourage your child from feeling upset, angry, or frustrated. Our initial instinct may be to say or do something to steer our child away from it, but this can be a detrimental tactic. Again, listen to your child, ask questions to find out why they are feeling that way, and then offer potential solutions to alleviate the bad feeling.

Just as we do, our children have feelings and experience difficult situations. By actively listening and participating with our child as they talk about it, it demonstrates to them that we do care, we want to help and we have similar experiences of our own that they can draw from. Remember, respond - don't react.