

Being a Good Listener

Really listening when our kids are talking to us can be a challenge. When we are not caught up in our own thoughts and only half listening, we are often tempted to make jokes about the things we hear, ask questions that make the conversation diverge onto a different path, or try to guess the outcome before it is delivered. All of these things interrupt the storyteller and make sharing the story much less fun.

If you haven't been practicing active listening and have been getting into the habit of any (or all) of the above, it's a good idea to go back to the basics and remind yourself how to be a good listener. Here are some ideas to help you do that.

1. When your child comes to you with a story about her day, set aside whatever you are doing and give her your full attention. If you are in the middle of something you can't put aside, tell her you really want to be able to give her story your full attention and ask if you could continue the conversation at a specific time.

"This sounds like an important story and I would really like to give it my full attention. Can we talk about it in ten minutes when supper is in the oven?"

2. Look at your child, make comfortable eye contact, and allow her to talk.

"Okay, I'm ready. Let's hear what you wanted to tell me."

3. Show you are listening through your body language (still focusing on the speaker) and by giving verbal feedback once in a while.

"Hmm; wow; interesting; go on; I see," while the head is nodding.

4. Check that you understand what your child is saying by clarifying pieces when required. Be sure to clarify, not make assumptions or take over the story.

"So, you and the twins were down in the basement with the dog?"

5. Listen until she has finished her story and then comment.

"Wow, that sounds like quite an adventure...thanks for sharing."

Active listening might sound like common sense, but often it's these simple skills that get buried in our parenting pack and easily forgotten or overlooked. Challenge yourself to practice this skill for a full week and see if you notice a difference in how much your child is sharing.