



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

(Adapted from *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting* by Dinkmeyer, McKay and Dinkmeyer)

Listening for feelings is important because it helps children know they are understood. It helps them think about what they are feeling and why. It can help them think through a problem. Listening well is a gift that helps children feel safe and know that feelings are normal and that talking about them is okay.

REFLECTIVE LISTENING is a special skill with some simple steps:

1. Listen. Let your body show that you are listening. You might bend down or sit next to the child and stop your other tasks. Look at the child and pay full attention to him or her. Breathe and stay connected to yourself and you listen carefully to your child.

2. Hear/observe the feeling. Listen to the child's words and observe the child's behavior, facial expressions and body language. Ask yourself, "What is this child feeling?" Think of a word within the child's language level that describes the feeling.

3. Use reflective listening. Think of yourself as a neutral, empathic mirror that reflects the child's emotion or emotions and use a respectful *tentative* tone so that he/she can correct your reflection. You can't always be sure you know exactly what the child is feeling. Some language you might use:

Looks like you're feeling sad.
Maybe you are feeling angry right now.
Seems you are feeling frustrated.
You sound pretty excited about that.

Keeping your reflections tentative gives the child permission to correct you if you named the feeling incorrectly. Don't worry, children will usually correct you if you don't name the just right feeling. Describe the feeling as exactly as you can, using words of degree as needed:

You seem a little worried about that.
Looks like you're very eager to start that project.
Maybe you are feeling really left out today.

Remember that body language as well as words can tell the child's story:

Your frown seems to say that you're disappointed.
When your face lights up like that, you look pretty happy.

Your voice tone and body language are most useful when they lightly reflect the child's emotional state as well. And finally, it is helpful to expand your feelings vocabulary. Reflecting that the child might feel "good," "bad," or "upset" might not tell the whole story. Look for more specific words when possible. This will help your child expand their feelings vocabulary as well.

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