

Tips on Listening to Your Child

Listening—it's not as easy as it sounds. It's often uncomfortable to really *hear* somebody else's point of view (especially if it's your child and she's right and you happen to be wrong. It could happen, you know!). You might hear something you don't want to hear. It's uncomfortable to be challenged. You might hear something that challenges your belief system, or makes you question your assumptions about life. You might hear something that will make you want to *change*. Listen up now, here are some reasons to work on your listening skills:

Listening carefully is how you gather information about what's going on in your child's life and head.

Listening effectively builds strong relationships.

Listening thoughtfully shows respect.

Listening is always the first step in solving problems.

Listening to your child's perspective will teach you a lot. Kids are smarter than most grown-ups think, and they generally know what they need. Listen to your kids, and they will teach you how to raise them.

If you want your child to listen to you, you'll need to first listen to her. A child who is listened to learns how to listen. And until she learns how to listen to you, it's the same as telling your problems to the bathroom mirror—no matter how eloquently you express yourself, nobody will be hearing you but you.

Here are the keys to improve your listening skills:

Listen first.

Always listen.

Create a special time and place for listening.

It's a Good Idea!

There's only one rule for being a good talker: Learn to listen.

It's a Good Idea!

A greedy communicator "takes" from instead of "talks," or adds to a conversation. The main difference between taking and talking is one little *l*. That *l* stands for "listening." To talk with somebody, you've gotta listen.

Use active listening.

Listen First

Listen first, and listen well, before reacting. The true story may take a while to emerge, the real feelings may take time. Okay, hotheads, this one will be a challenge for you! Can you count to 10? Practice!

Always Listen

I know, you've got a million things, people, and animals to focus on. And I'm telling you to always be aware of listening opportunities? Alas, yes. Kids aren't always organized, and kids with emotions (and last time I checked that was all of them) are even less so. It's hard for a child to wait until an opportune time to raise an important issue or disclose some vital information about how she got sent to the principal's office or that Toby beat him up because he accidentally shoved him into the garbage can. Sometimes a child will fret over telling you something important—and let it slip out just at the moment you are least expecting it. Perhaps you're on your way out the door to a board meeting, or making a left-hand turn into the most dangerous intersection in town, or checking that the soufflé hasn't fallen. Trust me, when you're least prepared is when the most vital information will slip from your child's little lips like a sigh.

Carpe diem—seize the day! Keep a constant low-level awareness, a sense of priorities. If Bobby is in hysterics or Sally is desperate to tell you about her date, perhaps you *can* rearrange your morning (and your life) and listen. (Can you call in sick? Cancel the carpet cleaner? Get somebody else to pick up for the carpool? It's important!)