



# PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of fourth-grade students

## Listen to Me!

Communication between parents and children is not always easy. Parents say their children just don't listen to them. Children complain their parents don't listen to them. Good listening skills are a family matter. Make sure to acknowledge and deal with everyone's needs and wishes. The key is to use communication that includes the parent and the child learning how to listen and talk together.

### Reacting vs. Responding

Many people react and fail to respond. Reacting means judging the situation based on your own feelings and experiences. Responding means making an effort to hear the *other* person's feelings regarding the situation. Responding means sensing the emotion behind another's words and allowing the other person to tell his or her story without feeling it is being judged.

### Reacting (negative feedback)

Imagine if you were this child. You come home from school, throw your math book on the table and say, "I hate math. I'll never be able to do division!"

Your parent reacts by saying:

- "Just keep trying; it can't be that bad."
- "I was always good in math and you will be, too. You're just not trying hard enough."
- "You shouldn't hate math. It's important."

Reacting messages frustrate people. They leave us feeling as though nobody understands what we are saying. Parents mean but they need to hear and acknowledge the child's feelings first.

### Responding (positive feedback)

This time, imagine you came home and threw your math book on the table and said, "I hate math. I'll never be able to do division!"

And your parent responded by saying, "Wow, you sound upset. What happened?" or "Division can be frustrating to learn. Tell me more."

These responses reflect the feeling behind the child's words. This invites the child to continue explaining his or her story and lets him or her know you will listen. If the child continues to speak of how they hate the assignment, suggest a break from it and wait until they have calmed down before doing more of the assignment.



Use communication that includes the parent and the child learning how to listen and talk together.

### Stress Less Activity



Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

Set a timer for five minutes. Listen to the other person without talking for the full five minutes. Switch. Now the other person listens to you for five minutes. Discuss how it feels to be really heard.

Most children simply need to vent their feelings and frustrations. When they have finished, you will be able to find a direction to follow, such as, "I'd be happy to look over your division problems with you," or "Would you like to see about some extra help from your teacher in the morning?" or "Let's break this into steps together so you can understand what you are learning. Then you can take it one step at a time."

Continue to reflect feelings and respond positively. If you think the situation is beyond you and your child's problem-solving skills, ask the teacher or school counselor for assistance in getting over the hurdle.

### How to Talk

The following techniques are taken from the book "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk" by Faber and Mazlish.

#### 1. Listen with full attention.

A parent scrolling social media and saying, "I'm listening," is not giving full attention to the child. Telling one's troubles is much easier for a child if a parent is able to sit down near the child, listen completely and not be distracted.

#### 2. Acknowledge with a word.

Thinking clearly is difficult for a child when the parent is questioning, blaming or advising. Words or phrases such as "Oh," "Umm," "I see," along with a caring attitude, are invitations for a child to explore their own thoughts and feelings. As a result, they may come up with his or her own solutions. This allows the child to first express all of their concerns before the parent engages in problem-solving.

#### 3. Give the feeling a name.

When we urge a child to push a bad feeling away, they only seem to get more upset. Parents often fear that discussing a bad feeling or experience may make things worse, but the opposite is true. The child who hears the words for what they are experiencing is comforted. This is a growing experience.

#### 4. Give a child their wishes in fantasy.

When children want something they can't have, parents often respond with logical explanations of why they can't have it. But having parents acknowledge how much something is wanted makes reality easier to bear for children.

For example, your child's friend is going on a fun vacation and your child wants to go, too. Try acknowledging this desire first. Give your child in fantasy what they cannot have in reality. Try responding with, "I hear how much you want to go. It would be so much fun for our family to go along. I wish I could do magic and we'd be there right now! What would we be doing if we were there?"



### Active Listening

Active listening involves sensitive attention to both verbal and nonverbal messages, and reflecting back the total message with empathy.

Are you an active listener? Make a visible and conscious effort to understand and care about what the other person is saying. Listen carefully for four things:

1. Who does most of the talking?
2. How do you respond to the other person's messages? Do you use feeling messages (responding, reflective listening, "I" messages)? Do you use feeling stoppers (judgment, reacting, denial)?
3. Are you quietly attentive? Do you respond to messages with empathy and understanding?
4. How would you feel if your messages were handled the way you treated the other person?



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