



Reflective Listening

When you listen to your children's feelings, you help them in many ways. Your children learn that they are understood. They learn that feelings are normal and that talking about them is OK. They begin to think about what they are feeling and why. They are better able to think through problems.

Reflective listening is a special kind of listening with some simple steps.

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

2. Hear and observe the child's feelings. Listen to the child's words and watch the child's behavior, facial expressions, and body language. Ask yourself, "What is this child feeling?" Try to identify the feeling with a familiar word that the child understands.

3. Reflect the child's feelings. Think of yourself as a mirror that simply reflects the child's emotions. Use your tone of voice, body language, and words to reflect those emotions. Gently offer the familiar word in a way that shows you're not completely sure what the child is feeling. Some language you might use:

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

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.

Keep in mind 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.

By offering mild reflections, you give the child permission to correct you if you don't name just the right feeling. Children will usually correct you if you miss the mark.

Finally, try to expand your vocabulary for feelings. Saying that the child might feel "good," "bad," or "upset" might not tell the whole story. Look for more specific words. Then you can help your child expand his or her vocabulary for feelings too.

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