

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Listening Is Love In Action

There are many ways to discipline a child. One way is to listen. Often busy parents fail to listen to and notice their children. When children feel they have something important to say or to show and are repeatedly ignored or tuned out by a "too busy" adult, they may do one of two things, neither of which is desirable:

- ▶ The child may give up and quit trying. The result is a child who does not communicate well. This stifles the growth of the child's mind, personality, ability, and self-confidence. OR
- ▶ The child may misbehave to get the attention. This behavior will usually get the attention of the adult, but may cause the adult to punish the child as well.

Why Listening Is Important

Nothing makes a person feel more cared about than to be listened to. Look for ways to spend special time with your child. Take time to be with the child as an interested, nonjudgmental person. Make time to talk about or do anything the child wants to do.

Listening increases understanding of and sensitivity to other people's feelings. Everyone's feelings have worth. Show your preschooler that you acknowledge and respect those feelings. Listening attentively will help you and your child better understand what feelings your preschooler is experiencing.

Listening makes it possible for children to be caring and responsible. Listen with respect. Children's concerns may be different from yours, but the emotions are the same. Give the child the freedom to express feelings and views without fear of ridicule or judgment. Listening is an act of loving and caring.

Listening sets early patterns for life-long communication skills. When you listen you teach your child he/she is important. You help your child trust his/her own perceptions, improve communication, and build a relationship for open communication. The investment of "listening time" can pay off in trust and courtesy. When you listen to your child, you model the caring behavior you want your child to develop.

Principles of Good Listening

Use silent and one word neutral responses. Instead of responding with advice, commands, conclusions, solutions, lectures, use a one-word neutral response such as "Oh . . . Mmm . . . I see . . ." Silent acknowledgment along with a nod of the head, eye contact, or a shrug of the shoulders is useful, too.

Listen for feeling and meaning. Be an active listener. Listen for the feelings your children are trying to communicate. This means listening to both verbal and nonverbal messages. Try to name the feeling using words such as frustrating, unsure, excited, or happy.

Listen to your children even when you don't like what you are hearing. Often it's the content of the message your child sends that you don't want to hear. If the child is feeling pain, is angry, loud, or even disrespectful, take a moment to consider the message the child is sending. Reflect back the feelings. For example, "You were surprised and hurt when Robby hit you and took your toy." or "You sound angry at grandma right now!" When your child is calmer, you can express any concerns about the manner in which the message was conveyed and suggest more appropriate ways to share feelings.

Repeat back what you heard the child say--and check out your interpretation. Reflecting back the feelings and meanings that you hear helps you understand the true meaning of your child's message. If you misunderstand the message, your child will be able to re-send the message. Repeating the message back to the child, in your own words, affirms the feelings your child is having and helps the child to further explore those feelings.

Don't always take your child's questions or comments at face value. Sometimes children have hidden fears that they are unable to directly ask about. By listening you encourage your child to get to the deeper message.

Be aware of nonverbal message. Spoken words are only part of the message. Watch for nonverbal cues

such as lack of eye contact, tears, clenched fist, hunched posture. These cues may help put the words in context.

Below is a checklist you can use to rate your listening skills. You might want to ask your preschooler to rate you as well. Your child's answers may help you find areas for improvement.

Sources:

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk. 1980.

Love and Limits: Parenting with Good Sense. Minnesota Extension Service. 1993.

Positive Parenting: A Video Based Curriculum. University of Wisconsin-Extension/Minnesota Extension Service. 1995.

Checklist Do You Listen To Your Children?

	Most of the Time	Sometimes	Rarely
1. Do I give my children the impression that I'm interested and willing to hear what they have to say?			
2. Do I put work aside when listening to my children?			
3. Do I look at my children when they talk to me?			
4. Does my body language show that I'm paying attention?			
5. Do my responses show that I've been listening carefully?			
6. Do I give all my children equal attention when they're talking to me?			
7. Do I avoid interrupting my children?			
8. Do I listen for feeling without jumping in to offer advice?			
9. Do I listen even when I don't like what I'm hearing?			
10. Do I repeat or rephrase what my child has said to see if I've understood correctly?			

Key: Ten "Most of the Time" answers indicate you listen well. "Sometimes" or "Seldom" answers may indicate some areas for improvement.