



17. Active listening

Active Listening means really listening, with your ears and your eyes, to both what your child is saying and how he or she is feeling. Then you repeat what you heard back to the child to check that what you heard was what your child really meant - e.g.:

Child: "I hate school. It's stupid."

You: "Did you have a hard time at school today?"

(If the answer is "yes", you will need to clarify if the hard time was caused by the other children being unfriendly, the teacher being angry or the work being hard.)

Concentrate on understanding the child's experience, not giving advice, passing judgment, or showing sympathy.

Active Listening can be a great preventive. To show your child you are trying to understand can help him or her to control all the bad feelings and to begin to move from tantrums towards a more constructive (and easier) approach to solving problems. Some children may have no other way to express their distress except problem behaviour. For you to show you understand, or at least are trying to understand, can help them take that next step.

Active Listening can be a valuable tool to use with ***Problem Solving (See Tip 18 - Problem Solving)*** to get behind the problem behaviour to the worry, upset or disappointment that led to it. It gives your child two important messages:

- ☺ "There's nothing so awful you can't talk about it to somebody" and
- ☺ "We can work this out together and make things better."

If your child is misbehaving, you may have to use Active Listening first to get the child to the point where he or she is ready to begin **Problem Solving**. BUT, listen carefully to the child's messages behind the behaviour. If your child is misbehaving only to get a reaction from you, and not because something upset him or her, Active Listening is not appropriate and you should ***not react but choose what you respond to. (See Tip 14 - Changing problem behaviour 3: Don't react - Choose what you respond to)***

Then, when the episode of problem behaviour is over, see if you need to use Active Listening to get your child to the point where he or she is ready to begin to work out how to do it better next time and so solve the problem.