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Prevention Tips for Everyone



# Know! to Create Strong Connections through Listening

Active listening is a skill you can use to connect with the young people in your life and build strong, safe, and trusting relationships. An active listening approach to conversations seeks to understand young people's perspectives rather than jumping in to fix their problems. Active listening gives young people a chance to express their thoughts and process difficult situations. It demonstrates that you care about their thoughts and feelings and can prevent difficult conversations from becoming arguments. When you utilize active listening skills, you show the young people you care about that you are someone they can talk to about the important parts of their lives.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Consider the following tips to hone your active listening skills:

## Focus your full attention

Sometimes, actions speak louder than words. When you show young people that you are focused on what they are saying, you communicate that you are available to listen to them and care about what they're thinking, feeling, and doing. Body language is an important visual cue that indicates your belief in the importance of what the young person is saying. Focusing your full attention during a conversation might look like:

- Getting close to your young person or on the same level of height,
- Maintaining eye contact,
- Responding nonverbally with appropriate nods and facial expressions,
- Using body language that communicates interest, like sitting still, turning towards your young person, and uncrossing your arms
- Turning off your phone, the TV, and any other device that might interrupt your conversation.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

## Be patient

Young people may not be ready to tell you everything during your conversations. Let them go at their own pace and take their time to open up to you. Allow them to express their full train of thought before you add your thoughts. You may be tempted to jump in and fix your young person's problem or offer advice, but doing so may send the wrong message and discourage future discussions.

When you swoop in to solve their problems, it may seem like their struggles are not okay to talk about or that something is wrong with them for having difficult emotions. Instead, listen to understand rather than to reply, and give them time to explore the issue and practice their own problem-solving skills.<sup>1,2,4,5</sup>

## Reflect their words and feelings

One of the best ways to show that you're actively listening to someone else is by reflecting their statements and feelings back to them. During your conversations, periodically summarize in your own words what your young person has said to you and validate their emotions. When you do so, it's best to avoid making judgments. Your reflections might look something like this: "What I'm hearing is that Sarah didn't invite you to the sleepover, and you feel hurt by that. I can see how that would be upsetting." Reflecting back your young person's words and emotions allows them the opportunity to feel heard or explain the situation in a different way. Either way, you're improving your communication.<sup>1,2,3,5</sup>

## Ask thoughtful questions

When the opportunity arises, take some time to ask your young person thoughtful questions based on what they've told you. Approach your questions with compassion and ensure that your questions are directly related to their situation. You might ask a question to clarify how your young person feels or encourage them to see the situation from a different perspective. You may also ask them about your role in helping them. Do they want help solving their problem or coping with the situation, or do they just need someone to listen to them? By asking thoughtful questions, you can work together to explore potential next steps and show your young person how much you care about them.<sup>1,4</sup>

## Resources

[Active Listening | Communicating | Essentials | Parenting Information | CDC](#)

[The Skill of Active Listening | The Center for Parenting Education](#)

[Cornell Cooperative Extension | Parents Can Use Active Listening](#)

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