

Six Concrete Behaviors for Improving How We Listen, Validate, and Encourage

Restating the Message: "So what you're saying is . . ."

- Provides proof of understanding
- Confirms to the speaker that you were listening
- Allows feelings to be revealed
- Active rather than passive
- Understanding people from their own point of view

Probing for More Information: "I was wondering . . ."

- Helps you get to the bottom of thing
- Involves a process of investigation
- Helps you understand the child's logic
- Keeps the dialogue going
- Allows you to label the feeling

Labeling the Feeling: "That must have felt . . ."

- Verbalizing feelings is difficult for some children
- If you guess the wrong feeling, the child will immediately tell you
- Putting language to feelings will increase the child's ability to talk about them

Validating the Feeling: "It's OK to feel . . ."

- Allows the child to feel heard and understood
- Promotes understanding that feelings aren't right or wrong, they just "are"
- Other helpful sayings: "I get that" . . . "I hear you on that one" . . . "That's OK."
- Is not the same as "agreeing"

Observing What You See: "I was noticing that . . ."

- Describes what the child did or said
- Can be used when things are/aren't going well
- If we want to nurture autonomy, we must also leave space for the child to make his own self-evaluations
- Encourages self-appreciation
- Communicated in a matter-of-fact way
- Provides a healthy way to talk honestly about feelings
- Promotes self-awareness within the child

Encouraging Your Desired Outcome: "You are . . ."

- Must be behavior specific (e.g. "controlling your talking, writing carefully" not "doing well or being good")
- Often follows an observation
- When we provide feedback to children that is specific, we make them feel visible and create opportunities for them to see themselves in a new way.
- Allows the child to make his own evaluations
- Reflect *what you want to have happen*
- Can be given when things are or aren't going well
- Is different than evaluative praise