

Developmental Considerations in Active Listening



**Resilient
Parenting**

FOR BEREAVED FAMILIES

Bereaved parents often wonder about how their children are doing. The best way to learn about your children is to listen to them using all your active listening skills. In fact, being a good listener is one of the most powerful ways parents and caregivers can help bereaved children. It can help to understand that children express themselves differently as they grow.



Young Children: Toddlers and Preschoolers (Birth to 5 Years)

Young children may express their concerns, wishes, and feelings in their play or drawings. They may also express themselves through brief emotional displays. Active listening with young children involves following the child's play. You can praise the child's behavior ("You are doing a great job of coloring"), reflect on what the child is doing ("The truck is going very fast"), show enthusiasm through your voice ("wow!"), and match your tone to what the child is playing (for instance, something happy or sad). You can also describe the content of the child's play through short sentences ("You drew a purple horse"). A short time period of playing and listening, such as 5 minutes, may be appropriate at this age.

School-Age Children (Ages 6-12)

Children this age can express themselves verbally as well as through play and art. Listening can be done following a child in an activity, such as arts and crafts, puzzles, sports, etc., or in a conversation. Active listening involves following the child's conversation using open-ended questions. Children this age are capable of longer periods of self-expression, so you can spend more time attending closely, using inviting body language and verbal encouragement. The feedback you give may be less exaggerated than with younger children and may simply follow the child's level of enthusiasm.

Adolescents (Ages 12-18)

Adolescents are seeking more independence, but they still need a warm and supportive relationship with a caregiver. Adolescence is a time when many things are changing, including biology, thinking, social life, and sense of identity. Children this age may be more likely to experience negative emotions. Although adolescents may be reluctant to share some emotions and events in their lives, active listening helps create a space for them to feel safe to share, at their own time and in their own way. Adolescents are sensitive to being judged or talked down to, so active listening needs to be genuine and accepting, even when they develop ideas that challenge those of their caregivers. Active listening does not need to reflect agreement with what an adolescent says, but can show acceptance of their different ideas. Parents and caregivers can be direct and open about their dual roles to both be supportive and nonjudgmental, while also setting reasonable rules and boundaries. Opportunities to listen may come at unexpected times, such as when helping with projects around the house, taking a walk, or playing sports.

MODULE 3: Listen to Your Children So They Will Share More

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