

ACTIVE LISTENING



How can parents listen better?

About active listening

Active listening and being able to approach topics without triggering defensiveness is a very important part of preventing youth crime and violence, or dealing with trauma resulting from crime or violence. There is a time to talk and a time to listen. This accompanied with age-appropriate information and setting boundaries can make a huge difference in a child's decision-making when facing a difficult set of choices. Here we discuss how to be a better listener.

The purpose of active listening is to understand the other person and make them feel understood. The basics of any good conversation still applies: pay attention, put your phone away, and try to not interrupt. However, there are some additional listening techniques you can use, which include asking open-ended questions, clarifying, summarising, and even allowing for silence.

Asking open-ended questions

One of the basics is asking questions that cannot be answered simply by "yes" or "no". These can give space for children to reflect on their feelings while allowing them an opportunity to find their own words. This can be a great way to start a difficult conversation as well as keep the conversation going!

instead of...

"Are you okay?"



"Did you like it?"



try...

"How are you feeling right now?"

"What did you think about [blank]?"

Clarifying

Once the conversation has been initiated, you should actively try to better understand their feelings and show you are listening—this is where the active part of active listening comes in.

Ask questions about what they said; if you are not sure about something, fight the urge to make assumptions about what they mean.

content
tired
satisfied
pressured
defeated
hopeful
jealous
worried
loved
depressed

happy
surprised
overwhelmed
hurt
excited
stressed
disgusted
grateful
scared
nostalgic
relieved
irritated
enthusiastic
confident
anxious
uncomfortable
appreciated
embarrassed
unsure
angry
misunderstood
frustrated
sentimental
resentful
proud
betrayed
shy
bored
awkward

Some examples on how you can clarify can be:

"It seems to me like you are feeling frustrated over what happened at school today, would you say that is right?"

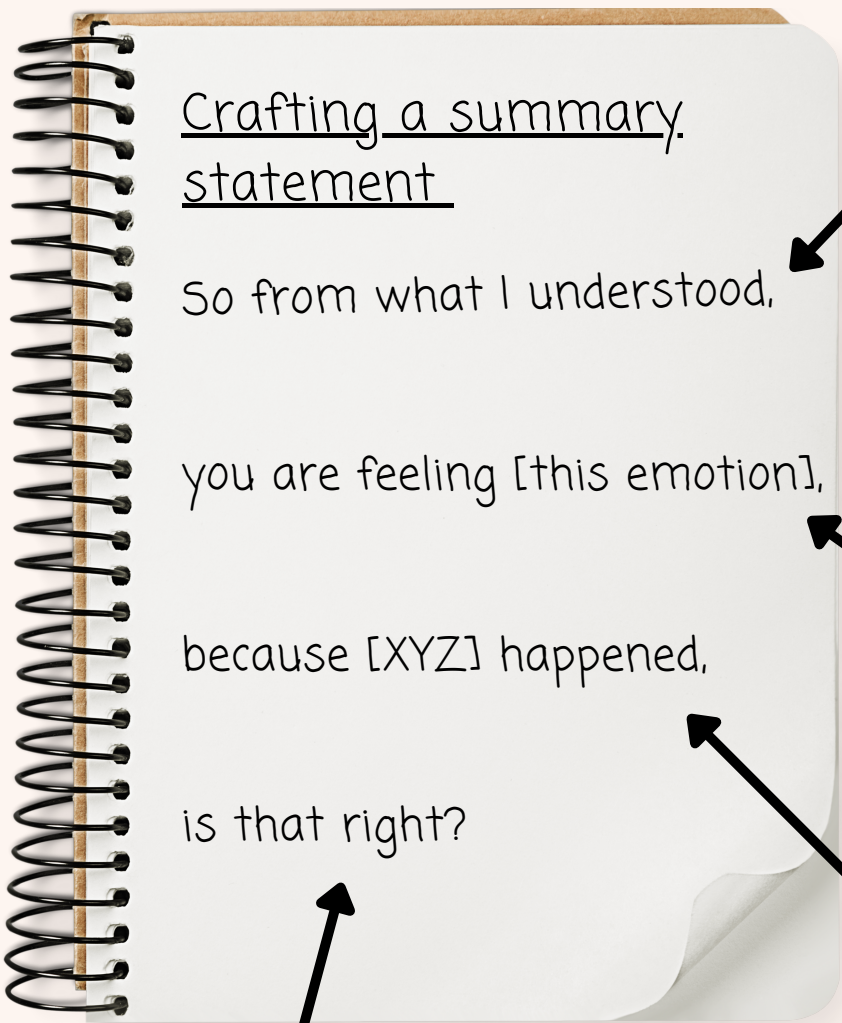
or

"So are you saying that [what happened today] made you feel really scared about going to school?"

Summarising

When the topic seems to either come to a close, it can be useful to summarise what your child has already said, to show that you listened and are trying to genuinely understand. While all the techniques listed here will benefit from you being specific, summarising might be the most strengthened by it.

This is a better way to respond than correcting the other person, or giving counter-arguments to what they have said. **Active listening is about understanding someone else's point of view, and not making sure they agree with yours.**

A spiral-bound notebook with a light blue cover and a white page. The page has handwritten text in black ink. Four arrows point from the text on the page to explanatory notes on the right. The notes are numbered 1) through 4).

Crafting a summary statement

So from what I understood,

you are feeling [this emotion],

because [XYZ] happened,

is that right?

1) **Opening line:** keep it focused on the fact you are trying to understand their situation

2) Mention any **emotions** that you've picked up on. They may or may not have mentioned this in the conversation

3) Add **details**. This is key, because the more you show you've listened, the more the other person will feel understood.

4) Leave room for correction! This makes sure that the other person can agree and discuss it more, or disagree and make sure you really understand correctly what they are saying instead.

Silence

While it can feel a little awkward at times, and you might have the instinct to keep talking in order to fill the silence, it's okay to allow lulls in the conversation. Sometimes, it can be really useful when someone is reflecting on what was said, or thinking about what to say next.

If the silence is too long and it might seem like it is getting uncomfortable, you can go back to other techniques to get the conversation started again. If this is something that concerns you—for example, if you have a naturally quiet child—you can start this conversation while doing an activity together. This can be any type of activity that still lets you talk, like a walk, doing a puzzle, building Legos, during a meal, or throughout a car ride. That way, if there is silence, it might not feel so uncomfortable because there will be something else to do; this is called sideways listening.

Further reading and additional resources

Connect with other parents through our [online forum here](#)

<https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/communication/activelistinging.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/jan/14/children-parents-talk-opportunities-sideways-listening-chats>