



Switching On by Switching Off

Information for Adults





Children and young people need adults who will listen to them. Act for Kids research shows young people really want to be listened to, but don't always feel they have someone who listens to them.

Moving through childhood means learning new skills, trying new things and facing new challenges. Listening to young people helps them feel safe and secure as they develop independence. It can be difficult to stay connected with your child as they enter the pre-teen and teenage years. However, it is important that children and young people have someone to talk to about the good things – and the difficult things – they go through.

Conversations can be planned or spontaneous – both create important opportunities to connect. The most important thing is to try to really listen when your child needs to talk.

Active listening is a communication skill that can help parents/carers connect with their child. Active listening means listening on purpose. It involves tuning in to your child's thoughts and feelings. Active listening helps families strengthen relationships and work through difficult conversations.

Does active listening mean I have to agree with everything my child tells me?

No! Listening and understanding does not mean you must agree with someone. Children learn from the behaviours they see. When we stay calm and talk to young people with respect, we help them learn to communicate their opinions and experiences in a calm and respectful way. So how do we really listen to a child or young person?

Make moments

Small talk leads to big talk. Ask them about their day – even if you don't get much information, you have shown them that you are interested in them.

Spend time together. Let them choose what they want to do to spend time with you by asking them – this gives them a safe sense of control and lets them know you are interested in them.

Some of the best conversations happen during car rides. This can be a great time for casual chats or meaningful talks.

Not every child finds it easy to talk openly with an adult. Communicate in a way that suits them – perhaps you can start with a text then build on those messages to create conversation. Share funny memes to let them know you are thinking of them.

Enjoy your time together! Let them know you enjoy them and value them.

Conversation starter

How was your day?

Fine.

Want to chat later?

Close all the tabs in your brain. Try to avoid getting distracted by your own thoughts so you can really focus on the conversation.

Put down your phone, turn off the TV, or remove other distractions that make it difficult for you to tune in to them. Take time to stop and be with them.

Get close. Move to the same room or be near them.

If you can't focus on them right away, let them know you will give them your attention as soon as you can.

Listen (don't talk)

"Do you need some advice or do you just want me to listen?"



- ♥ Clarify what they need from you
- ♥ Don't give advice or help unless they ask for it
- ♥ Listen with your eyes and ears
- ♥ Look at them kindly
- ♥ Keep your body relaxed and calm
- ♥ Give them a chance to talk through the problem in their own way and their own words
- ♥ Let them finish - try to avoid interrupting or telling them they're wrong
- ♥ Put yourself in their shoes and try to listen without judgement

Ask (don't tell)

When they have had a chance to talk, ask questions. This helps them develop problem-solving skills, and helps you make sure you understand their experience

Open-ended questions let them know you're listening

Ask thoughtful questions that are not judgemental.

Ask questions so you don't have to guess how they're feeling.

Ask questions to make sure you understand them.



"What happened next?"

"What was that like for you?"

"How did that make you feel?"

"Let me see if I understand. You're feeling sad because your friend wasn't there for you..."

Connect

Sometimes conversations are more about connecting than talking. Tuning in to children and young people helps us connect with them, even during difficult conversations.

Simple words can:

...help them feel loved

"I'm sorry that happened to you today"

...help them feel safe

"I'm here if you need someone to talk to"

...show you understand

"I bet that was tough. I understand why you're upset"

...show you care

"I'm glad we spoke about this"

...show you value them

"I enjoy talking with you"



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Act
for kids