

1. Learning to Listen

At a Glance...



Reflective listening is a skill that parents can use to improve communications with their children. When parents demonstrate that they understand their children's feelings, children are more likely to be open with their parents and talk to them about problems or things going on in their lives.

Time Required



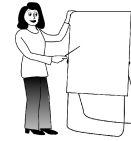
45 minutes or more, depending on the number of participants

Core Concepts



Parents will use reflective (active) listening with their children and other family members.

Objective



Participants will demonstrate reflective listening from situations they discuss in class.

Materials



- ☐ Flip chart or chalk board
- ☐ Markers or chalk
- ☐ Paper
- ☐ Pencils
- ☐ "Reflective Listening Formula" (handout C-1-a)
- ☐ "Identify the Feelings Activity" (handout C-1-b)
- ☐ "Reflective Listening Activity Sheet" (handout C-1-c)
- ☐ "Reflective Listening Activity Key" (handout C-1-d)



Icebreaker

Identify the feeling:

Write words that convey emotions on index cards (one emotion per card). Give each class member a card and ask them to try to convey the emotion to other class participants to see if they can guess the emotion. They can do this through words (without saying the word for the emotion) or through facial expressions, body language, actions, or a combination of those things. (To help everyone feel at ease, you should act out the first emotion. For example, you might convey frustration by acting like you are ready to pull your hair out.)



Facilitator Script

Think about a person with whom you don't like to talk. What are some things that person does that makes talking with them unpleasant?

(As participants name things, list these on the chalk board or flip chart. Some responses may include...

- not listening
- always interrupting
- telling me what to do
- always having a better or worse story than mine
- telling what I said to someone else)

What are some ways parents or adults make children not want to talk to them? (List these on the board or flip chart.)

Here are three common types of responses we offer to children that may turn them off.

- a. We may respond to children like a **know-it-all**. The know-it-all lectures and gives advice to show just how much he or she knows. This tells children they cannot deal with their own problems. The "Know-it-all" may use statements like "If I were you, I would..." or "What you need to do is."
- b. We may respond to children like a **judge**. The judge finds the child guilty without listening to the child's story. Judges always have to be right. There is always a right and wrong way to handle everything and the judge's way is the right way. Judges use statements like "What did you do this time?" or "You never do anything right" in response to their children's problems.

- c. We may respond to children like a **consoler or comforter**. The consoler tries to make all problem disappear by acting as if there are no problems at all. This makes the child feel misunderstood. Favorite phrases of the consoler are “You’ll forget about it tomorrow,” or “It’s just puppy love.”

What are some examples of other ways we may respond that cut children off or make them feel like we aren’t listening?

There is a better way to respond to children. It is called “**Reflective Listening**.” This is a way to show children that we are listening, that we care, and that we understand.

- a. Reflective Listening is a way of trying to look at things from your child’s point of view.
- b. It is responding to the feelings behind the words the child says.
- c. It is nonjudgmental (It’s OK to feel that way.)
- d. It is not belittling to them.

Give each participant a copy of the “Reflective Listening Formula” (handout C-1-a.) You may also write the formula on a poster or the board so that everyone can see it.

Have participants to brainstorm feeling words. Using the flip chart or chalk board, list feeling words that class members name. You may make two columns, one for positive feeling words, and one for negative feeling words. For example, positive words might include happy, excited, joyful, calm, proud. Negative words might include sad, scared, anxious, misunderstood, ashamed, upset, angry, frustrated.

Children sometimes have difficulty putting their feelings into words. When you use the correct word to describe their feelings, it helps children to feel understood by you, and it helps them to learn appropriate ways to express their feelings. We sometimes tell children to use words to express their feelings instead of using actions like hitting or biting. However, when children don’t know the words to describe their feelings, they become even more frustrated and may act out because of being unable to express their feelings with words.

Parents can help children learn words for feelings by looking at pictures of people or animals and talking about the feelings being expressed in the pictures (happy, angry, upset, excited, scared, etc.)

Facilitator Tip:

If your class members have young children, you might allow them to make their own feelings folder that they can use with their children. Bring old magazines or calendars to class and allow participants to go through them and cut out pictures of people or animals that express feelings. Provide glue, paper, scissors, markers, and folders. Participants can glue one picture to each piece of paper and use a marker to print the word for the emotion being shown below or beside each picture. Participants can put the pictures in a folder and look at them with their children. This activity will help parents and children learn to use appropriate words to identify feelings. It will also help improve children's reading and vocabulary skills, and it is a positive activity that parents and children can do together.

How do you tell what your child is feeling?

(List ideas on the board or flip charts. These might include...

- a. Listen to the tone of voice.
- b. Look at the child's posture.
- c. Look at the child's facial expressions.
- d. Listen to the words.
- e. Watch the children's actions – sometimes they don't have to say anything for you to figure out how they are feeling.)

Practice identifying feelings. If you have a group of participants, cut apart the statements on the handout "Identify the Feelings Activity" (handout C-1-b.) Fold the statements and put them in a basket. Let participants draw out a statement. Ask them to read the statement to the group as they think a child might say it. The rest of the class tries to guess what feeling the reader was expressing. If you have only one participant, take turns reading the statements and guessing the feelings being expressed. Some statements can be used to express more than one feeling, depending on the tone of voice, expression, or body language.

Ask for two volunteers from the class to act out the two scenes that follow. If there is only one participant, take turns with the participant in being the child or being the parent and act out the following two scenes. One volunteer will be the parent, and the other will be the child. After each scene, discuss the questions that follow with class members.

Scene 1:

Child: (coming home from school, throws down his/her books and says)
“I hate Miss Smith!”

Parent: “That’s not a nice way to talk about your teacher,” or “Don’t use that tone of voice in this house.”

How does the child feel?

How might the child respond if the parent reacts this way?

Will the child continue to talk with the parent?

Scene 2:

Child: (coming home from school, throws down his/her books and says)
“I hate Miss Smith!”

Parent: “Sounds like you are really angry at your teacher,” or “You must have had a bad day. Do you want to tell me about it?”

How does the child feel?

How might the child respond if the parent reacts this way?

Will the child continue to talk with the parent?

Hand out the “Reflective Listening Worksheet” (handout C-1-c.) Have class members take turns responding to the child’s statements. They may respond as a “know-it-all,” “judge,” “consoler,” or use a reflective response. Other class members can try to identify which type of response is being given. Make sure that everyone tries to make at least one reflective response. If you have only one or two participants, allow them to work independently on the worksheet. If time is limited, focus on the reflective responses. Take turns sharing answers with each other. You may use “Reflective Listening Key” (handout C-1-d) for examples of each type of response. These are not the only correct answers.

Final Thoughts



Reflective listening is sometimes hard to do, especially with children. Often adults think it is our job to tell a child what to do. This keeps us from listening to what children are feeling. Children may have a hard time describing their feelings as well. Reflective listening takes practice. Let's try to practice reflective listening with each other.

Facilitator Tip:

You should use reflective listening with your class members as well. For example, if a participant comes to class and is unusually quiet or even crying, you could say, "You seem sad today," or "It seems like you have something on your mind." This will give that person the chance to share with you if he or she wishes, or at least to know that you notice and care about him or her.

Homework

Ask participants to practice using reflective listening with their children or with other family members when they get home. Tell them you would like for them to report what happened at the next class. Remind participants that reflective listening not only works with children, but it works for adults as well. These skills are useful at home, work, church, or whenever you are with other people.