



Basic Counseling Skills II - Listening for Feelings

**“We were given two ears and one mouth
because listening is twice as hard as talking.”**

When adults complain that a child is not listening to them, there’s a good chance that the adults aren’t doing a good job of listening to the child

When we listen effectively, we understand what the child is thinking and/or feeling from the child’s own perspective.

- It is as if we were standing in the child’s shoes, seeing through his/her eyes and listening through the child’s ears.
- Our own viewpoint may be different and we may not necessarily agree with the child, but as we listen, we understand from the child’s perspective.

**Acknowledging feelings doesn’t mean you approve or agree.
You only recognize that the child has that feeling.**

For Example: The child may be feeling defeated, like he may never be successful because he finds school so difficult. If you are truly listening, you acknowledge his feelings, and don’t try to convince him that he is wrong, that he is not a failure, that things will be fine, etc. The truth is, right now he is feeling crushed and you can help him by recognizing his feeling, whether or not you believe it to be true.

In a situation like this, **which response feels better?**

“Oh, don’t get so upset...you’ll be fine. It’s not as bad as you think.” **OR**

“It sounds like you’re feeling really frustrated and overwhelmed. That must be scary.”

- The first response denies the child’s feelings and shuts down the conversation. The child doesn’t learn to recognize his feelings and furthermore believes that you just don’t understand.
- In the second response you can see how the child would feel understood, accepted and more willing to continue the conversation.

When we show, by active listening, that we accept a child's feelings, it helps the child learn to **recognize** and **accept** their own feelings. The child learns from our response, that feelings are natural and normal and they become less afraid of their negative feelings.

Many people think that they can get rid of their feelings by suppressing them, forgetting them, or thinking about something else. Actually, people release troublesome feelings when they are encouraged to express them openly.

- Just listen and stay with the feelings. No need to try to solve the problem immediately.
- Simply expressing feelings and feeling validated is helpful to the child

Guidelines for Reflecting Feelings:

- Listen for the feelings behind the words - Pay attention to posture, tone of voice, and body language along with words.
- Use an appropriate introductory phrase (e.g., you sound..., you must be feeling..., it seems you're...sometimes it can be...etc.)
- Add a feeling word or emotional label to the phrase (e.g., you sound *frustrated*...you must be feeling *sad*...)
- End with "when" (e.g., It can be frustrating *when* you don't understand your homework.)
- Do not repeat the child's exact words
- Reflect mixed emotions when appropriate (e.g., I can tell you're feeling mixed about that...you're happy that you were chosen for the performance, but you're really nervous about doing well.)
- Check how accurately you understood the feeling with the child - If your response wasn't correct, the child will let you know by saying something like, "No, I'm not angry, just disappointed with him."
- Avoid interjecting judgment or personal statements - Never try to talk someone out of their feelings. (e.g., don't say, "You don't need to be so worried...things always work out.")

Adapted from Parent Effectiveness Training

Emotions - Feelings Word Vocabulary

Emotion

Intensity	Happy	Sad	Angry	Scared	Confused		
Strong	ecstatic elated energized enthusiastic excited exuberant jubilant loved marvelous terrific thrilled uplifted	crushed defeated dejected depressed devastated disgraced drained exhausted helpless hopeless hurt rejected terrible unloved unwanted discarded	sorrowful uncared for worthless wounded burdened condemned demoralized deserted distraught empty grievous humbled miserable mournful pitiful	abused betrayed enraged furious hateful hostile humiliated incensed outraged pissed off rebellious repulsed seething strangled vengeful	exploited fuming mad patronized repulsed spiteful throttled used vindictive	afraid appalled desperate dread fearful frantic horrificed intimidated overwhelmed panicky petrified shocked terrified tormented vulnerable	baffled bewildered constricted directionless flustered stagnant trapped
Mild	admired alive amused appreciated assured cheerful confident delighted determined encouraged fulfilled grateful gratified joyful justified optimistic proud relieved resolved respected valued	ashamed despised disappointed discouraged disheartened disillusioned dismal distant distressed inadequate isolated lonely neglected slighted unappreciated upset	abandoned alienated degraded deprived disturbed drained islanded resigned slighted wasted	agitated annoyed controlled disgusted exasperated frustrated harassed infantilized irritated offended peeved resentful ridiculed smothered stified	aggravated anguished cheated coerced deceived dominated provoked	alarmed apprehensive axed defensive guarded insecure shaken skeptical startled stunned suspicious tense threatened uneasy	ambivalent awkward disorganized doubt foggy hesitant misunderstood perplexed puzzled torn troubled
weak	content flattered fortunate glad good hopeful peaceful pleased relaxed satisfied	apathetic bad deflated disenchanted lost sorry	dismayed displeased tolerant uptight		anxious concerned doubtful impatient nervous perplexed reluctant shy timid unsure	bothered distracted surprised uncertain uncomfortable undecided unsettled unsure	

Listening for Feeling Worksheet

Child's Sentence	Feeling	Response
Why did she make me stay after school anyway? I was not the one who was talking!		
Look! I made an airplane with these papers.		
Will you stay with me when we go into the new school?		
I am not having any fun. I can't think of anything to do.		
I'll never be good like Arjun. I practice and practice and he is still better than I am.		
My new teacher gives us too much homework. I can never get it all done. What should I do?		
All of the other kids went to school. I don't have anyone to play with.		
Saachi was chosen to dance for the annual show, but I am a better dancer than she is.		
I should not have been so mean to Priya. I guess I was 'bad'.		
I want to wear my hair this way – it's my hair, is it not?		
I can do it myself. You do not need to help me. I am old enough to do it myself.		

Math is too hard. I am too dumb to understand it.		
Go away; leave me alone. I do not want to talk to you or anybody else. You do not care what happens to me anyway.		
I really want to go play with Daania and her friends but what if she laughs at me for asking?		
I never want to play with Anil again. He is mean.		
I am sure glad that I am best friends with Brisha and not Akasha.		
I think I know what to do, but maybe it is not right. I always seem to do the wrong thing. What do you think I should do?		

Listening for Feeling Worksheet Answer Key
(Sample answers – there are many correct responses)

Child's Sentence	Feeling	Response
Why did she make me stay after school anyway? I was not the one who was talking!	Frustration, anger	"You're really angry because you think you weren't treated fairly."
Look! I made an airplane with these papers.	Excited, proud	"You must be so proud!"
Will you stay with me when we go into the new school?	Scared, apprehensive	"It is scary to go to a new school where you don't know anyone, isn't it?"
I am not having any fun. I can't think of anything to do. All of the other kids went to school. I don't have anyone to play with.	Bored, restless, lonely	"Sometimes you get really bored and lonely when everyone else is gone."
I'll never be good like Arjun. I practice and practice and he is still better than I am.	Disappointed, sad, frustrated	"It's disappointing to work so hard and still not be as good as you'd like to be."
My new teacher gives us too much homework. I can never get it all done. What should I do?	Overwhelmed, concerned, anxious	"You're feeling so overwhelmed with all of your homework..."
Saachi was chosen to dance for the annual show, but I am a better dancer than she is.	Cheated, discouraged	"It sounds like you feel cheated"
I should not have been so mean to Priya. I guess I was 'bad'.	Sorry, ashamed, regret	"You are a little ashamed of how you treated Priya."
I want to wear my hair this way – it's my hair, is it not?	Harassed, annoyed	"You feeling like I'm harassing you and would just like to be able to make your own decisions about your hair."
I can do it myself. You do not need to help me. I am old enough to do it myself.	Independent, determined, confident	"I can see that you're growing up and feeling very independent."

Math is too hard. I am too dumb to understand it.	Defeated, lost, hopeless	"Sometimes doing homework makes you feel completely lost."
Go away; leave me alone. I do not want to talk to you or anybody else. You do not care what happens to me anyway.	Hurt, unloved, unwanted	"It hurts to feel like no one cares."
I really want to go play with Daania and her friends but what if she laughs at me for asking?	Anxious, apprehensive, shy	"Sometimes you feel really shy around Daania and her friends."
I never want to play with Anil again. He is mean.	Upset, hurt, angry	"I can tell you're really upset about the way Anil treated you."
I am sure glad that I am best friends with Brisha!	Grateful, pleased, glad	"You're grateful for the wonderful friendship you have with Brisha."
I think I know what to do, but maybe it is not right. I always seem to do the wrong thing. What do you think I should do?	Unsure, puzzled, confused	"It sounds like you're really confused about which way to go in this situation."