

Actively Listening to Children



SE04 All Interest Areas

Objective 1

Regulates own emotions and behaviors
a. Manages feelings

Related Objectives: 2a, 2b, 8a, 9c, 10a, 12b

What You Do

Background: Active listening helps you to get to know children while letting them know that you care about them. As you listen, you model empathy and good listening skills that children need to build successful relationships with peers. Children learn names for their feelings, an important skill that will help them to regulate their emotions in the future. Active listening can help to defuse challenging situations when children are experiencing strong emotions. Sometimes children just need to know that you understand their feelings in order for them to calm themselves.

- 1. Notice when children are experiencing strong emotions** e.g., frustration, anger, excitement, sadness, and elation.
- 2. Move close to the child and move your body to his or her level.**

3. Make eye contact and offer a gentle touch, as appropriate, to let the child know you are listening.

4. Repeat back what you hear the child telling you through words or actions.

5. Name and explain children's feelings. Use words to describe children's feelings accurately, e.g., *frustrated, annoyed, disappointed, excited, proud, or embarrassed.*

“You are frustrated because your tower fell. You spent a lot of time building it.”

“Miguel, you are really sad because your mommy just left.”

“Jessika, I can tell you are excited about our trip to the zoo today!”

Additional Ideas

You can use active listening with other *Intentional Teaching Cards™* that address social-emotional guidance strategies, e.g., pair “Actively Listening to Children” with “Supporting Children to Use Their Words.” For example, “You feel angry because James took the zebra you were using in your zoo. What can you say to James to let him know how you feel?”

Including All Children

- Make eye contact and ask the child questions she can respond to with yes or no. Make sure to give the child enough time to understand the question and answer it.
- Use social stories or provide dramatic play activities to increase the child's understanding of the situation and to suggest some appropriate responses.
- Record appropriate responses on a child's communication device.
- Use pictures of faces showing various feelings as you talk about them.**

Teaching Sequence

YELLOW	<p>Repeat the child's words or expression of feeling in language she can understand. Reflect the same tone that she is expressing. This lets the child with limited language know that you understand what she is feeling.</p> <p>Rachel, 35 months, tries to grab a truck out of another child's hand. The other child says, “No, Rachel! I had it first!” Rachel screams, drops to the ground, and kicks her legs. The teacher kneels near Rachel. The teacher scrunches her nose and furrows her brow while saying to Rachel, “You want that truck! You really want that truck!” Rachel screams again. “You really want that truck! You really, really want it!” the teacher repeats with the same expression. Rachel stops screaming and starts whimpering softly. The teacher gently touches Rachel's knee and says, “It is really frustrating when you want to use a toy that someone else is using.”</p> <p>At arrival time, Anibal rushes into the room smiling broadly and says, “Abuelo come for visit!” The teacher kneels down and hugs the child. “Your grandfather is coming to visit you! How exciting,” she says enthusiastically, smiling.</p>
GREEN	<p>Repeat the child's words with understanding and empathy.</p> <p>A child sits crying softly in the Library area. The teacher sits next to the child and gently rubs his back. “My mommy's at work. I wanna stay at home with mommy.” The teacher nods her head and says, “You really wanted to stay home with your mommy today. You love her so much.” “Yeah,” says the child. The teacher continues, “You're disappointed that you couldn't stay home with her.” “She had to go to work,” the child says. “You're feeling sad because you miss her. It is hard to be away from people we love,” the teacher responds.</p>
BLUE	
PURPLE	

Questions to Guide Your Observations

- If upset, how long did it take the child to calm himself? (1a)
- How did the child respond to you? (2a)
- What feeling words, if any, did the child use to express his emotions? (2b)
- How did the child communicate his feelings? (9c)

Related LearningGames®

- 126. Showing Concern