



Good Advice: Listen First

Your child comes home from school visibly upset. She tells you that she believes that some of the other girls were teasing and making fun of her. What do you do? Do you immediately offer your quick take on the situation and offer her some advice? Do you offer her a quick and easy solution? Are you positive that is what your child wants, and indeed, what she needs right now?

Quick judgments and snap solutions may seem like the best way to deal with this situation, but stepping back and allowing her to vent her feelings, and guiding her to a problem solving situation — if indeed that's what is needed — may be the best, and in the long term -- the most helpful approach you can take.

Active Listening

Active listening is the key. You hear your child is upset and your own emotions become activated. You remember yourself in situations similar to this one and you react to that. Empathy is an important piece of active listening, but first you may need to step back and assess your child and her situation without your own emotions affecting your response. When you do display empathy, it signifies acceptance of your child's feelings. You can then calmly assess what it is your child really wants and needs. Instead of 'hearing' your child, it's time to 'listen' to her.

By stepping back from your emotional response, you will feel more relaxed and project this to your child. Show her that she has your full and undivided attention. Allow her to talk and retain eye contact. You know your child well, so watch her body language and nonverbal communication to pick up other clues about her feelings. At this point, respond with nonverbal signals, that is, nod your head, smile, or frown. These small elements of your behavior will encourage her to continue to confide in you and allow her to feel free to tell you all of her feelings. She will become progressively calmer as she realizes that she is free to express herself to an understanding parent.

The next step is to mirror what she is saying. Repeat phrases back to her, especially in terms of what she says she is feeling. An example of this might be, "I understand that you feel sad because your friend was mean to you." The more you mirror, the more you will find out what is at the root of the problem and the more your child will believe and understand that you are really listening.

Active Problem Solving

By using the above techniques, you may realize that your child may not be looking for advice on what to do, but merely needs to talk about her feelings and put the incident in a different light. However, if advice is what she indicates she wants, a good approach is to help your child problem solve. The child then becomes an active participant in finding a solution to enable her to deal with the same feelings when she encounters similar situations in the future.

Once the problem has been recognized and discussed, you can help her explore different solutions or ways to handle it. Engage her actively: Has she ever found other ways to deal with these situations? Ways that worked at the time? What does she think would work best? Talk about these solutions and the possible consequences of each. After your child is satisfied with her choice, offer her support and encouragement.

You can reassure your child that you are there for her. And by using these active listening and problem solving steps, your child will believe and trust that your help, understanding and guidance are indeed there for her.

ParentIQ ©2016