

# Family Strategies

# Listening Deeply

**Ages:** 4-18

**Who?**

One-on-one with your child

**What?**

A set of active listening techniques to practice with your child

**When?**

5-10 minutes a week

**Why?**

Listening deeply to others helps us to see and feel things the way they do while building trust and connection with them. We can show others we care about them by using body language, focus, empathy, and caring questions.

**How?**

Step 1: Ask your child to describe a significant moment from this week such as a challenge or a highlight at school. While listening, focus on demonstrating the skills listed below. [Appendix 1](#) describes these active listening techniques in more detail.

- **Body Language:** How is your body positioned in relation to your child?
- **Focus:** Are you *truly* listening to what your child is saying, or are you waiting for your turn to speak? Try to minimize distractions, thoughts, and judgments.
- **Expressing Empathy:** What are you saying or doing to make your child feel heard? Regardless of your internal reaction to what they are saying, try to consider *why* your child feels the way they do and how you can better connect with them.
- **Questions:** Ask clarifying and genuine follow-up questions to convey that you are actively listening.

Step 2: Talk about it with your child.

- How does it feel to be listened to? What did it look or feel like?
- How might listening deeply help you be a better friend or classmate? Why is this important?
- Did you learn anything new about yourself? What did you learn?

Step 3: Over the next few weeks, ask your child to be the listener. Help them improve on their listening skills through your open and honest answers during the debrief.

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## Appendix 1: Active Listening Techniques

Skills	Active Listening	Disengaged Listening
<b>Body Language</b>	Eye contact, nodding, facing toward the speaker	Slouched, arms crossed, facial expressions that communicate disapproval or disgust at the speaker (e.g., eye rolling)
<b>Focus</b>	Say “mm-hmm” at appropriate times, repeat key words mentally for reinforcement, keep your phone out of sight, avoid thinking about your response while the other person is talking, and avoid distractions (e.g., side conversations, phone notifications)	Look at your phone, look away, think about something else or yourself, interrupt the speaker with stories about yourself
<b>Expressing Empathy</b>	After the speaker has finished their thought, you can demonstrate that you heard what they said by paraphrasing (e.g., “So what I heard was...”), or asking thoughtful clarification questions (e.g., “what did you mean when you said...?”). You can validate feelings by saying, “I could sense that you felt... is that right?” and “I can understand why you’d feel...”	Asking the same question over and over, bringing up your own story right away after they’re done speaking, misrepresenting what they said, telling them that what they felt was wrong, changing the subject without reference to the speaker’s last statement(s)