



Actively Listening to Your Adolescent

Quality communication is a critical part of successful parenting, and active listening is an important component of positive and productive communication with your adolescent. Active listening is making a conscious effort to hear the words your adolescent is saying and to understand the entire message they are conveying. There are four key steps to being a successful active listener.

Step 1: Be Present and Limit Distractions

Showing your adolescent that they have your undivided attention helps your child understand that how they feel and what they are saying is important to you. Be sure to concentrate on what is being said. By including nonverbal gestures that show you're listening — like nodding or smiling — your adolescent may feel more willing to share with you and be open with you (Vitalaki & Katsarou, 2021).



Step 2: Do Not Interrupt

While your adolescent is speaking, concentrate on their words, and do not think about your response. If you are formulating your reply, your attention will be distracted, and you may miss key points. Wait until your adolescent has finished speaking, or better yet, ask them if they are finished speaking before you respond.

Step 3: Withhold Judgement

When listening to your adolescent, do not make judgments on the words or actions, and make a point to hear the whole story. It is important for your child to feel that their thoughts and feelings are valid and deserve consideration.



Step 4: Paraphrase What Was Said

When talking with your adolescent, repeat what they said by using statements like, "I hear you saying..." and "It sounds like you feel..." followed by "Does that sound right?" Paraphrasing shows your adolescent that you understand or don't understand what they said, which will allow your child to clarify points for you.

Actively listening to your adolescent can help create a safe and trusting communication environment in which your child feels heard and understood. As a result of the trust that is built, you may be better able to prevent or diffuse conflict and understand your child's needs, so you can find solutions together.

References:

- Vitalaki, E., & Katsarou, E. (2021). Active listening: A model for teachers and parents to actively listen and act upon children's concerns in terms of their perceptions of quality of life. In F.N. Valanidou, L. Neophytou, M. Anatasou, & M. Koutselini (Eds.), *Children's life quality: Participation, recreation, and play* (pp. 74-104). University of Cyprus: Center for Social Innovation.

Additional resources, skills, and strategies for parents are available at no cost through the online Thrive Initiative programming. Visit the Thrive website <https://thrive.psu.edu>, and sign up today!