

TAEG September 17 2014
Helping Children Deal with their Feelings
With Doone Estey

We all need to have our feelings accepted and respected.

1. Listen with full attention, quietly and attentively.

Direct eye contact is not always necessary, as this can be too intense for children, especially teens. Try not to react strongly.

2. Acknowledge what they are saying with some paraphrasing and reflective listening:

“Oh... mmm...I see...”

“She said that? That’s what happened?” “Really...”

3. Empathize with your expression:

Mirror their facial expression and body language – surprise, discouragement, sadness, frustration, joy.

4. Guess their thoughts and help them articulate them:

“Could it be that you are feeling pressured, lonely, discouraged...?”

“You seem overwhelmed.”

5. Identify their feelings and help them name them. Acknowledge and empathize:

“That sounds annoying!”

“I could see that would be frustrating!”

“You sound sad.” “I would feel the same way.”

6. Give them their wishes in fantasy, if not reality:

**“Are you wishing things could be different?”
“I wish I could make things better for you.”**

7. If you had a part in their distress, take responsibility and apologize:

“I am sorry for what I did when I lost my temper. I plan not to do that again.”

8. Last resort: accept feelings as you redirect the behavior:

“I hear how much you’d rather do something else. The problem is you gave people your word. They’re counting on you.”

9. When we are dealing with our own feelings and our children notice, we owe it to them not to brush them off and say “Oh, nothing’s wrong”. We need to be honest, direct and hopeful.

“Mom is feeling humiliated after the things Aunt Gertrude said but I am going to be ok.”

“Dad is angry about the work meeting but I am going to talk to the manager about it”.

Resource: How to Talk so Teens Will Listen... Faber & Mazlish
Parenting Network
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