

The Power of Listening

A Guide for Parents

PARENT
SERIES





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Countless educators and human service professionals have benefited from CPI's highly effective approach to empathic listening. This guide explains how parents can use these same skills and techniques when dealing with their children.

For 40 years, the Crisis Prevention Institute has helped millions of individuals begin a journey of positive, supportive, and empathic caring for people of all ages. With a focus on healthcare, education, human services and dementia care, CPI sets the standard for best practices in evidence-based workplace violence prevention. Our training is designed to support the safety and well-being of both staff and those in their care. We teach the skills that help professionals de-escalate verbal and physical crises in the workplace, with an array of solutions that address the full spectrum of risk levels.

The Skill of Listening

As a parent, Empathic Listening is one of the most powerful tools you have for building trust and rapport with your children. By taking the time to listen to your children, you help to build their self-esteem. You communicate the message that they are people of value and worth.

But Empathic Listening is not an automatic process; it is more than simply hearing your child's words. Being a good listener is a skill, and like any skill, it takes time and effort to develop.

This brochure will help you understand the benefits of Empathic Listening and give you some strategies to help you become a better empathic listener.



The Benefits of Empathic Listening

One of the best strategies for listening well is to use a process called Empathic Listening. You don't need to dispense advice, ask prying questions, or give false reassurances. Empathic Listening is an approach to listening that allows a child to talk through a problem and feel understood, without your having to solve the problem for them.

Empathic Listening has a number of benefits:

- **Empathic Listening takes the burden off you.**
You don't have to have all the answers, and you don't need to give advice. Giving advice, especially to teenagers, usually backfires anyway—your advice is often seen as just another lecture. When you listen empathically, you don't tell your child what to do.
- **Empathic Listening is a good way to help your child talk through a problem and get at the real issues.**
Your child determines the direction of the conversation—not you. You will find that you can open up the conversation without having to ask prying questions.
- **Empathic Listening allows your child to vent.**
They can release their feelings, in a safe place, without having to hear advice or judgment about their behaviour.
- **Empathic Listening is an excellent way to let your child know that you understand their concerns.**
The need to feel understood is important to us all.

CPI's Five Steps to Empathic Listening

1. Give your child your undivided attention.

Move away from distractions and focus all of your attention on your child. Don't try to do two things at once—your ability to listen will suffer.

Make sure that your non-verbal communication sends the message that you are ready to listen. Don't fidget in your seat or play with pens or paperclips. Instead, make eye contact, lean slightly forward, and nod your head periodically to let your child know you understand what they're saying.

2. Be non-judgmental.

If your child comes to you and admits to having a problem with some form of substance abuse, for example, it won't be helpful for you to deliver a lecture on the dangers of drugs. Passing judgment will probably drive them away.

There are also more subtle ways to judge others. When you make statements that trivialize or make light of someone's problems, you are being judgmental as well. For example, telling a teenager who's just broken up with her first boyfriend that she's making "a mountain out of a molehill" is expressing a judgment about the seriousness of her problem. It may not seem important to you, but it may be the most important thing happening in your child's life at that moment.

3. Focus on your child's feelings, not just the facts.

Some children are able to describe their problems but not easily identify how they feel about what is happening to them. You need to listen carefully for your child's real message. Is your child feeling angry, resentful, powerless or scared?

CPI's Five Steps to Empathic Listening

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4. Allow silence for reflection.

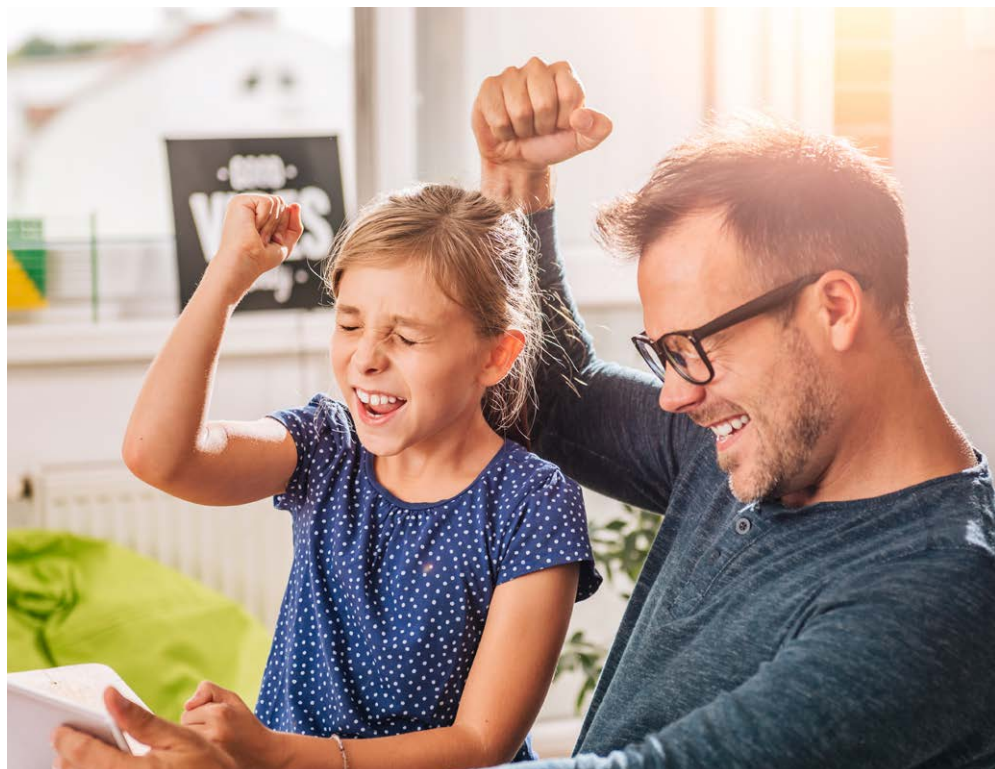
Before you speak, allow your child some time to reflect on what they've said. Slowly count to three before you respond. More often than not, they will be the one to break the silence with further information or reflection. You may be surprised how little talking you need to do during the Empathic Listening process.

5. Use restatement to clarify messages.

Restatement means that you put what your child has said into your own words and repeat them back. You can restate the actual content of their message ("During the math test, Miss Davis accused you of cheating, and you were sent to the office."), or you can reflect back the underlying feelings that you picked up on ("You're really angry about this, aren't you?").

Then, allow your child to clarify your interpretation. Sometimes they haven't accurately expressed themselves. At other times, you may have misunderstood something that was said. By offering your interpretation, you give your child the opportunity to clarify, and perhaps expand their message.

Empathic Listening is a powerful tool that can help you better understand your children. By strengthening your trust and rapport with them, you'll be better able to positively influence their behavioural choices and help them become independent adults.



Whatever steps you've decided to take, remember that it takes time and effort to change old behaviour patterns. Try to be patient with yourself—and your children.

Thank you for reading! We hope you found this resource helpful.
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