



## Reflective Listening

Parenting is challenging under the best circumstances. An illness or loss in the family makes it even more difficult. When a parent or caregiver is ill, children are often more emotional and parents have less time and energy to meet their needs. Reflective listening can be a vital parenting tool.

Reflective listening is a method of responding to your child's feelings and thoughts without asking questions. Questions indicate that you don't understand what they're going through, while adding additional pressure on the child to tell you more. Making a reflective statement, however, implies that you already understand what they're going through and that your child's thoughts and feelings are important to you.

- **Reflective listening requires a parent to tune into their child's cues, including his or her nonverbal communication, and to make statements about what the parent notices or understands. For example, "You are so excited! You can't wait until grandma gets here." Or, "You are feeling shy and don't want to talk to Mrs. Smith right now".**
- **Reflective listening is especially helpful when your child is emotional or when your child is unable to put their thoughts or feelings into words. When you can reflect what you see from your child's nonverbal cues, your child feels acknowledged and valued, even if the situation is emotionally trying. For example, if your child is upset because you can't play with him/her, you might say, "You are really disappointed. You really wish we could play together right now."**
- **When parents listen reflectively, children often feel better understood. They are more likely to reach out to you in the future and try to express themselves because they believe you will try to understand. Over time, parents also gain a deeper understanding of their child's perspective.**

Many parents skip the important step of reflecting their children's emotions and immediately state an expectation, teach a lesson, or set a limit. The problem with this is that children are much less likely to respond if they do not feel understood. Their emotions often escalate, or they shut down. When a child feels understood, he or she will begin to let go of that emotion and hear what you are saying.