

## Parent Card Listening

We spend most of our day speaking or listening. Children spend a large amount of time listening at school, to the teacher, other students or to electronic media. Listening is also our primary means of socialising and developing both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. There are different types of listening; for example, our listening changes when we listen to a song on the radio, follow instructions to pay a bill by phone or listen to a friend with a problem.

Parents can help their children to develop effective listening skills by modelling good listening behaviours and discussing different types of listening. Use the following suggestions to model effective listening for your child.

**Demonstrate attentive listening:** There are times when your child needs your complete attention, free of distractions from television, phones or chores. Maintain eye contact and show, through body language, that you are attending closely. This will demonstrate your interest in what your child is thinking or feeling.

**Encourage speaking:** Children are often hesitant and need prompts to help them initiate speaking. Ask open-ended questions, such as *"How did you feel at the time?"* Extend conversations by repeating parts of your child's speech and building on it.

**Listen patiently:** Sometimes children think faster than they speak, or struggle with the vocabulary needed to explain a problem or situation. Take time to listen. Help your child with words to clarify their thoughts and develop their speaking.

**Avoid hasty judgements or solutions:** Try to 'hear your child out' before reaching any conclusion. Your child may not be asking you to jump in and solve a problem for them. They may need the opportunity to clarify thoughts or to properly understand a situation. They may need your help, or they may be able to reach a decision independently — you won't know until you've heard the 'whole story'.

**Be aware of non-verbal behaviour:** It is often the things that are not said that give the strongest message. Observe your child's body language; that is, facial expressions, posture and gestures. Also note their tone of voice and any generalised statements. Point out the behaviour as you notice them and encourage your child to use words to try and express their feelings. You may have to choose another time to explore issues in greater depth.

**Demonstrate empathic listening:** Listening with empathy means that you can identify with the feelings of others. This is an important listening skill and requires practice. Model this type of listening by trying to mirror your child's feelings; for example, you might say things such as *"You sound angry, is that because...? I would have felt sad if that happened to me too... It seems that your feelings were hurt."*