

Tips for Listening to Children

The way you listen to children can assure them that they are valued. As you seek to make a connection to a child, keep in mind these dos and don'ts:

- **Put Yourself at the Child's Level**

Sit or kneel. Look into the child's eyes. *Don't* listen while you are doing something else or turn away when the child is talking.

- **Give the Child Time to Gather His/Her Thoughts**

Don't fill the child's silence with your own thoughts.... Be quiet, take your time!

- **Convey "I hear you" as the Child Talks**

By nodding, tilting your head, widening your eyes, etc. *Don't* interrupt or finish the child's sentences.

- **Acknowledge the Child's Feelings**

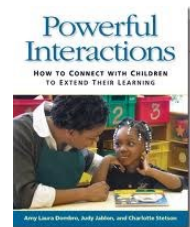
Label what you are observing. "You look upset, is something wrong?" *Don't* assign the feeling by saying, "That made you angry."

- **Teach Children to Wait While You Listen to Others**

Thank children for their patience, "Thank you for waiting so I could listen to Sarah." Make suggestions that other children or teachers might be able to help, "Michael, I can't tie your shoe right now. But Miss Sabrina knows how. Perhaps you could ask her to help you."

"Teachers report that through listening, they can truly be "in the moment" with children. Through listening, they are better able to spontaneously support and challenge a child to extend his or her thinking."

Kaminsky and Gandini, 2002.



Powerful Interactions

How to Connect with Children to Extend Their Learning

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Asking Open Ended Questions

In the blocks area:

Teacher: *Why did you decide to put the triangle-shaped block on top?*

Child: *So it can be the roof.*

Teacher: *What might happen if you didn't have a block on top?*

Child: *Then the rain might come in.*

Teacher: *How else could you keep the rain out?*

Child: *With an umbrella.*

Teacher: *How would that work?*

Unfortunately, I notice when I'm with children that while I tend to ask a lot of questions, they're not always open-ended. I really have to work to broaden my repertoire of questions and be quite intentional about asking questions that encourage children to come up with their own ideas.

So, how can we remember to ask these kinds of broad, thought-provoking questions?

Be Prepared

Before reading a book with children write questions and statements on sticky notes and flag selected pages:

"Look at the cover. What do you think this book will be about?"

"Why is the monkey throwing coconuts?"

"Tell me what you think will happen next."

Ask *"How did you decide ... ?"* to get children to talk about something they are doing.

Extend the Conversation and Slow it Down

To keep the conversation going, follow up with *"What if you ... ?"* or *"How else could you ... ?"* and present an alternative to the action they took to help them articulate their decision-making process.

Provide lots of time and opportunities for children to practice responding to these types of questions. Wait, wait, wait for them to answer, avoid filling the time with your voice (when I'm working on building my wait time, I discreetly tap each of my fingers to be sure children have at least 10 seconds to reply). They may not be used to conversations that are more open-ended, and it might take some time for them to get familiar with responding in more complex ways.

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Give yourself time to make asking open-ended questions a regular part of your teaching practice.

Teachstone® Making the Most of Classroom Interactions. The Pre-K Making the Most of Classroom Interactions (MMCI) program is based on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ (CLASS™) framework and focuses on identifying and understanding these very interactions.

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