

Therapeutic Skill: Empathic Listening & Tracking

What is Empathic Listening?

Empathic listening is a process of listening and reflecting. It is used to show the child that they have their parent/carer's undivided attention and to give the child the experience of being fully understood and accepted - just as they are. We simply notice and reflect. This way of responding is a way of following the child rather than leading the child.

Empathic listening also helps parents/carers to see the world from their child's point of view. This, in turn, helps parents/carers to better understand their children and ultimately make more effective parenting choices. Win, win!

At the core of empathic listening are two techniques - tracking statements and empathy statements. We often begin these statements with the word, "you". This helps both the parent/carer and child to maintain focus on the child's perspective and to help the child deepen their own understanding of self.

Tracking Statements

Tracking statements are focused on behaviours and actions. When we use tracking statements we simply say what we see. This can help children become more body aware, which can be specifically helpful for them in noticing when they are beginning to feel overwhelmed, and can help with dysregulation.

We can liken tracking to sounding like a 'dulled down' sports commentator.
For example:

- "You filled that all the way to the top"
- "You chose the yellow crayon"
- "You lined them all up"
- "You're clenching your fists"

Empathy Statements

Empathy statements are focused on feelings and thoughts. When constructing an empathy statement, we always start with the word, "you", and then add both what the child is feeling or thinking and why.

By adding in an explanation of why a child is feeling or thinking a certain way, we help the child begin to make connections between experiences and feelings and help them to better understand their own emotions.

Remember to check your child's facial expressions and body language to identify their feelings or intentionality.

Examples of Empathetic Statements

"You feel nervous because you haven't been in here before"


"You really wish we could play for longer"

"That surprised you"

"You don't like the way that turned out"

"You weren't sure where to start but now you have an idea"

Let's Connect!

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