



The Power of Listening

A Guide for Parents



THE CRISIS PREVENTION INSTITUTE (CPI) trains staff in the language of behavior. How to recognize it as a form of communication. How to prevent it from escalating at the earliest possible stage. How to appropriately respond when it threatens employee safety or quality of care or service. How to get in front of it and stay in front of it to minimize the likelihood of reoccurring issues. Over 17,000 facilities, 30,000 Certified Instructors, and 10 million trained professionals trust CPI to help create more confident and productive employees who leave a lasting positive impact on the people they serve. More than 35 years ago our founders gave us the middle name of Prevention for a good reason. It always has and always will be at the heart of everything we do.

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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.



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.

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Self-Assessment

The following questions will help you assess your own style of anger management when dealing with your children.

1. Why is it important to listen to your children?

2. Why is it sometimes hard to listen to your children?

3. What is the best way to respond to your children after you've listened to them talk about problems or concerns they're having?

4. What is Empathic Listening?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how effective do you think you are at listening to your children?

(1 = not effective at all; 10 = extremely effective)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



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Self-Assessment Answers

1. Listening to our children is an important way of building their self-esteem. When we listen to them, we affirm their value and worth as human beings—we show that we are willing to give our time and energy to hear what they have to say.
2. It can be hard to listen to our children for many reasons. Sometimes we're busy with other things and don't feel that we have the time to listen. Other times, we are distracted by our own worries and concerns and find it difficult to pay attention. There may also be times when we really don't want to hear their message because the topic (e.g., sex, drugs) makes us uncomfortable.
3. There are many ways to respond to our children; some are more helpful than others. Giving advice, asking prying questions, or giving false reassurances that "everything will work out" are generally not good strategies. One particularly helpful strategy is a process known as Empathic Listening.
4. Empathic Listening is an approach to listening in which the listener responds in a caring, nonjudgmental way toward the speaker. It is more fully explained in this brochure.
5. Regardless of how you answered this question, this brochure is designed to strengthen your skills as a 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 behavior.
- **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

Here are the five steps to listening empathically:

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 nonverbal 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 nonjudgmental.

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? What are their feelings?





CPI's Five Steps to Empathic Listening (Continued)

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 to them. 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 behavioral choices and help them become independent adults.



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Post-Test

Now check to see how much you've learned:

1. Empathic Listening is a way to express your opinion about problems your children are facing.

True or False

2. Empathic Listening allows your children to talk through a concern or problem and begin to think about solutions.

True or False

3. Empathic Listening can help your children feel understood.

True or False

4. CPI's Five Steps to Empathic Listening include:

- a. Give your child your _____.
- b. Be _____.
- c. Focus on your child's _____,
not just _____.
- d. Allow _____ for reflection.
- e. Use _____ to clarify messages.

5. Why is Empathic Listening often a better strategy than giving advice?

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Post-Test Answers

1. **False**
2. **True**
3. **True**
4. CPI's Five Steps to Empathic Listening:
 - a. Give your child your **undivided attention**.
 - b. Be **nonjudgmental**.
 - c. Focus on your child's **feelings**, not just **facts**.
 - d. Allow **silence** for reflection.
 - e. Use **restatement** to clarify messages.
5. When you give advice, especially to older children, it is often perceived as another lecture and your children may simply tune out. Empathic Listening allows your children to talk through their concerns and begin to figure out their own solutions. This is an important step in their growth and development.



*Whatever steps you've decided to take, remember that **it takes time** and effort to change old behavior 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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