

# 10 Ways to LISTEN to Your Child

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

child, feel, kids, reflective listening, parents, hear, conversation, nervous system, listen, homework, listening, wait, talking, work, give, respond, lecture, invalidate, kiddo, attune

## SPEAKERS

Seth Perler

 Seth Perler 00:00

Hey, parents, what's up? It's me, Seth, with SethPerler.com. I'm an executive function coach based in Maui and I help struggling students navigate this thing called education so that they can have a great life. And if you want to have a better relationship with your kids, and you want to feel like you can listen to them better, that's why I made this video. If you're a teacher, you might like this video a lot as well, because what I am teaching here is absolutely relevant in a teaching scenario. So the first thing that I want to mention here is that what we're trying to do, is we're trying to get from point A to B. So I'm an executive function coach, I help struggling students go from point A to point B. I work with families, I work with kids, I work with schools, but mostly the students. And what happens is parents hire me because they want to have a transformation with their child, where the child goes from point A to point B, or the family goes from point A to point B. Point A is where you are concerned about your child, you're worried you're you're noticing that your child is struggling to get important things done. And if they don't figure this out, they're going to limit their choices, and possibilities, and opportunities in life. You want them to have a great life now, and have a great future. And you're concerned. So that's point A. Point B is they've turned a corner, your child has turned a corner. They have what I call 'good enough executive function.' You can go, "Ah, my kid's gonna be okay," or you the teacher can go "Ah, this kiddo is going to be okay, they've got some skills, some executive function skills. It's not perfect, but they're going to be okay, they've got. They've got this, they've really turned a corner."

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So that's the journey we're on. If we want to be on that journey and we want to help the kids, we have to be good listeners. And many of us, many of us have learned dysfunctional and maladaptive ways of communicating, whether or not we know it, that gets in the way. So the first thing that we have to do is understand that we need to connect with our kids. Connect with our kids. And we need to do what's called 'co-regulating.' Co-regulating has to do with how our nervous systems are always talking to each other. A lot of times when parents and kids are talking, they're co-regulating, their nervous systems are speaking in emotion and frustration. And neither person is hearing the story or the things that you're trying to communicate. Neither the child nor the parent are hearing each other. We're always mirroring our nervous systems. We're always trying to attune. The more we try to attune, we get in tune with each other, the more we're going to be able to communicate with our child. We need to feel safe. There's something called Polyvagal theory that talks about safe and social needs. Essentially, our nervous systems always want to feel safe. And if you feel like your child is not hearing you, and it's hard for you to hear your child, consider how safe both of you feel. What I mean by that is the nervous system feels safe and unthreatened. Like they're not being listened to, and so on and so forth.

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Alright, so I want to just explain that a little bit by showing you a of couple of pictures. We co-regulate all the time, you can look at this picture, you know what this puppy is feeling just by looking at the picture. You know what this child is feeling just by looking at this photo of this child. You know what Michael Jordan's feeling here in this moment, you know what this puppy is feeling right here. Okay, so we are always co-regulating, we're all always vibing, our nervous systems are always reading other nervous systems. So as I go through these 10 things that I'm going to help you with here, these 10 ideas for how to listen to your child, know that we're always co-regulating This is a big part of listening is knowing that we're attuning, we're co-regulating, our nervous systems are mirroring each other. Alright, here we go, here are the 10 things.

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Number 1: The first thing that I want to tell you is that the issue is not the issue. Okay? So when you're talking to your child, or your child's talking to you about something, oftentimes, when we get stuck in emotion, the issue that you're talking about, the words that are coming out of your mouth, are not what's really going on. So before you can get to the story, or the conversation that you're trying to have with your child, really ask what's going on here. Step back, what is the message of my child's nervous system? What's the nervous system telling me? Not the words that they're saying, but maybe their

nervous system is saying "I can't do this," or "This is too hard," or "I don't know where to start," or "I'm feeling attacked by you." Notice what's going on in their nervous system, because if you don't get to a regulated state, you're not going to hear each other. So if you want to be able to better listen to your child, know that the issue is not the issue. Notice what's going on with the nervous system. The issue is not the issue. That's number one on how to better listen to your child. Know that often what you're talking about is not the actual issue, and start with the issue, then you can get to that story.

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Number 2: Next, I talk with my parents that I work with about pre-conversations all the time. So parents, if you want to listen to your child better, you're going to start with a pre-conversation. So what happens a lot of times is that parents will go in and start a conversation with their child and things get heated, or they just get uncomfortable and you're not getting anywhere. And you have the same conversations over and over and over, and they just don't get anywhere. We want to start with a pre-conversation. A pre-conversation allows your child to not feel like you're coming out of left-field. I hear this all the time from kids, their parents are just coming out of left-field. They don't see it coming. The kids don't know how long you're going to lecture them, how much you're going to nag them, how much you're going to bug them, how much you're gonna annoy them, how long the conversation is going to last, where the conversation is headed, and when it's going to end. And all that abstraction makes their nervous system feel unsafe, which means that they can't access their executive function well enough to even participate in the conversation. So the issue is not the issue, right? You want to start with a pre[conversation that says, "Hey, I'm gonna let you mentally prepare for this conversation. What's up, kiddo? I want you to have time to regulate your nervous system, and you're not in trouble. I'm gonna listen to you. " It's something like this, "Hey, I need to talk to you about school. You're not in trouble. And we're gonna talk about 7pm, I'm gonna talk for about 15 minutes. As long as your forthcoming, we're done at 7:15pm. Even if I'm not done, we're done. And I really want to hear you, I really want to listen, I really want to understand you. And you're like I said, you're not in trouble, and we'll be talking then." So that's a pre-conversation. There are many ways to do it, but it's just saying, "Hey, here's what's coming. There's some structure around it, you're not going to be stuck in an endless loop of me lecturing you, and trying to make you see the light, and trying to use my logic and reason to convince you of something. We're gonna have a conversation where I'm going to hear you, but I need to share something with you. So that's number two, if you want to listen to your kid better start with a pre-conversation.

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Number 3: Next thing is called 'wait time.' So what happens is we often go back and forth and ping-pong. And I'm speaking very fast. Parents, often, they know their response, and they respond very quickly. And, Alexa off, sorry, I have music playing in the background that was distracting to my executive function there. So where was I, people? Wait times strategy. So I learned this, from George Betts many years ago, all about wait time, but it's how to really listen and hear and understand your child. This helps with what's called 'secure attachment' so that your child feels more secure with you, more heard by you, you can use eye contact, you can reflect back to them what you hear when you're waiting, but just don't respond like a ping-pong ball. Wait, then wait more, let them have time to process. Let them have time to notice that, it says to think through their words and process what they want to say to you, and not to put the pressure on them. So when you ask your child something, you're communicating with them, and it's time for them to respond. Maybe they give their first default response, and maybe you know, it's not true, or it's not well thought out. For example, maybe say, "What do you have for homework?" "Nothing." And then you go to your ping-pong, your default, "Are you sure?" "Yeah." "How can you have nothing? You haven't had any homework for two weeks?" "Just get off my back. I know what I'm doing. I did it all at school," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, this is ping-pong, this is not wait time. So something different, well, I'd probably say, "What do you have homework?" I'd probably approach it completely differently, but that's a whole nother video. Anyhow, let's say you're gonna say that, "Hey, what do you have for homework?" "Nothing." "I'm listening. Tell me more." "Well, I have a math thing that..." blah, blah, blah. You're giving wait time, you know. You need to really give a lot of spaciousness, and I suggest that you start counting in your head. So when you ask your child a question, don't talk, don't interrupt. When they respond, don't just start responding to the response. That's the magic. Okay? When they start responding, when after they're done responding, wait even longer, and say, "I'm still listening, keep going." And don't stare at them like this. Like, you can give them some space, especially if they're an introvert and be like, "I'm still listening." They have to understand that they are emotionally safe to say what they need to say. A lot of wait time. Count how long it takes, you'll start seeing a pattern. I see kids who it takes them about three seconds. Well, it's either immediate, about three seconds, about 10 seconds, and then occasionally I've worked with a kid where I've had to wait 30 seconds or more. But then they eventually say something and it's so cool. That's where the magic really happens, when you give that spaciousness to wait. Slow down, parents. Slow down. I know I'm talking fast, but I'm making a video on YouTube here. Slow down with your conversation with your kid. Give some wait time, give some breathing room. 90% listening, you want to do 90% listening, 10% of the talking. Seriously parents. You know I've been working with kids and doing this so long, and I see the pattern so much and parents often just repeat the same lectures, and nagging, and things, and bugging their kids with the same stuff. I mean, you could write a script of this stuff and it would be the same script over and over and over and over, month after month, year after year. So, do a

lot more listening. Really practice that listening. 90% listening, 10% talking. Really ask your kid a lot more, really spend a lot of time. I just want you to be thinking about that 90% listening. Reflective listening is really a great way to mirror with your kid to attune to them, so that they feel listened to. And basically, they're going to say something to you, and your instinct is going to be to justify that, or explain it, or lecture them, or try to use logic or reason, you know, you're in this place where you're trying to use reason. You're trying to reason with your child, you know, you want them to hear you. But if you want to be a better listener, as parent, hear them, reflect back to them. You know, they say something to you, rather than you just responding, say, "Okay, okay, okay, hold on. So is this what I hear you're saying?" blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, "You're telling me this is how you feel, or this is what you think, or this is what you think, I think, or whatever? Is that right?" Your child will say "No, blah, blah, blah, here's what I think." Well, that's good information. Now you know you didn't hear them. So then you reflect back, "Okay, so you're telling me blah, blah, blah?" "No, you don't get it. Listen to me, blah, blah, blah." "Okay, so you're telling me this?" "Yes." Now we're getting somewhere. So reflective listening really gets you more present with what they're actually trying to say, so that you can actually be of service to your child.

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Number 4: The next one I have out of 10 is validation. "I hear you." Now this is very related to reflective listening. Reflective listening is validating. We often invalidate our kids, they're trying to tell us something and we tell them why what they're saying isn't good enough. That's what they hear us saying. They're hearing us saying, "You're telling me I'm wrong. You're telling me what I say isn't valuable. What I say isn't good enough. What I say doesn't matter." That's what they hear. That's not what you're trying to do, your intentions are good parents, but they're hearing, "You're invalidating me, you don't really care what I have to say, you don't want to hear what I have to say." And we get very lost in these conversations. So your kid wants to be validated, or if you want to be validated. When you have somebody who invalidates you, you don't like it, you know, it's it drives you nuts. Whether it's at a store that you're shopping at, whether it's with your spouse, or friend, or anybody. Feeling invalidated is really hard. And you know that there's some people that are not secure for you and will never validate you. That's a losing battle. You don't want your kid to feel like that, you want them to feel validated. Doesn't mean that you agree with them, does not mean that you necessarily agree. But it means that you hear, you hear what they're trying to say. 'I statements.' "I feel such and such when you do this." So a lot of times when we don't use I statements, and we're using 'you statements,' you statements say things like, "You make me so upset, you make me so angry, you make me feel so sad, you make me so discouraged. You drive me nuts." That's a victim mentality. "You are making me something, I'm a victim of you. Because of you, I feel this way." That's

not a way to listen to your kid, that's not something that's really gonna feel connected to them. But if you start saying things like, you know, "I feel sad when you tell me that," you know, and don't say "disappointed." That's like, that's again, a you statement. "I feel disappointed in you. I feel sad watching you struggle in school. What can I do to be helpful?" The next one that I have on there says 'in my body.' So you can say like, "I noticed in my body that I feel tight when we're having this conversation, I noticed that I feel uncomfortable and a little anxious. I feel like I'm not being heard, and I feel a little sad right now. So you're not saying you you you, you're saying "This is how I'm experiencing this." And that opens up a completely different dialogue than the you-you-you blame game-type conversations that we've often been indoctrinated with.

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Number 5: And next thing is "What do you think?" So ask your child and child says, "Hey, Mom, Dad, can I do this?" "What do you think?" "Well, I think I should be able to because blah, blah, blah." "Oh, well, I'm not so sure about that because of blah, blah, blah." But "What do you think?" That's again with validation. What do you think? And they come and ask you for help with homework, or this or that, and you can say, "What do you think?" So often when I do 'what do you think' with kids when it comes to like school strategy stuff, they often, like speak through it, and then they come up with their own answer. So anyhow, that's just another good one is the "What do you think?" It's a curious, what do you think, it's not condescending. It's a very open vibe, you're listening attentively. It gives them ownership. Parents often, you know, tell them what they think and say the answer. Well, let your kids say what they think so that they feel heard and understood. It'll help build your relationship.

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Number 6: And then just ask your child, "What can I do to improve our connection or our relationship?" Ask them. Just ask and listen. "Hey, I want to have a better relationship with you. I want to have more fun with you more joy, more peace, less arguing, less homework battles. I want to feel more connected to you. What can I do to grow our relationship? Just ask, ask.

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Last thing I want to talk about is do your own deep inner work. I'm not going to sit on this long. But basically what happens is, is that we don't do our own deep inner work and we're not working on ourselves, and we're just looking at our kid and what they need to do and how they need to change and all this stuff. They know it, they feel it, they can tell

we're not working on ourselves, they can they feel like we're hypocrites. And we want to do our own deep inner work, our own journaling, or meditation, or prayer, or therapy, or self-help or self-development, or support groups. I'm not trying to sound cheesy here at all, but people have done the work to learn this stuff. They spent decades of their lives learning about human dynamics. They know how people can help themselves. Dive into it, why would you not? The reason we don't is because we have ego tied up into it, and we have fear that if we start asking for help that means there's something wrong with us. No. If we ask for help as a parent to become a better parent, that means there's something right with us. That means that we're working on ourselves, so do your own deep inner work because that really models for your kid. Like even if you don't tell them, they feel it. And that makes us better listeners.

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**Seth Perler** 16:56

Those are my 10 things for you. Those are 10 ways to better listen to your child. I hope that was helpful to you. My name is Seth Perler, go to my site, [SethPerler.com](https://sethperler.com). I have a bunch of freebies for your parents and teachers. If you like what I'm doing, please share this with somebody. I've worked very hard at what I do. I'd love it if you could take a minute share. Give it that thumbs up which helps the algorithm. Subscribe to my stuff and leave a comment below. What do you think? How do you advise people to better listen to kids? Any tips for us? Leave them in the comments below. Have a fantastic day. My brain is fried. Bye.