

Extension Tip of the Week

Building positive relationships with children is a lifelong task and it has lifelong rewards and is well worth the effort. Here are five tools that ISUE suggests to help the effort along:

1. Listen for feelings. When your child comes to you with a problem or when he or she expresses strong feelings, it helps to say something like, 'Sounds like you're feeling' — and then name the feeling. Follow up with 'I'm here to listen if you feel like talking.' This helps your child feel like you are trying to understand.

2. Practice reflective listening. This means when you are working together with your child to solve a problem, take a moment to summarize what he or she has said. Then your child knows you really have heard what was said. Don't criticize or lecture. Instead, repeat what your child has said and voice your support, or in some cases why you disagree, with the solution to the problem, such as 'Yes, I agree that you will take out the garbage right after supper.'

3. Use "I" statements. Let your child know how you feel, why you feel that way and what you want him or her to do. For example if your child gets too far away from you in the grocery store — running into the next aisle where you can't see him or her — when you catch up you might say, 'I feel frightened when I can't see you because I think you are lost and not in a safe place. I want you to hold onto the grocery cart while I finish shopping.'

4. Solve problems together. Work together with your child, listening to each other's point of view, thinking through some possible solutions and choosing options to try.

5. Follow through with decisions. After you've reached an agreement with your child, follow through by reminding your child about the agreement.

For example, if your child has agreed to empty the garbage after supper and you find it still under the sink, find your child and give a short reminder that the garbage needs to be taken out. Use as few words as possible. You might say, 'Our agreement was that you would take out the garbage right after supper; it's still there. It's time to take the garbage out.'

These tools, when used consistently, will help establish positive relationships among family members and enable children to feel loved and capable.

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