

Talking To A Distressed Child

Following some training with Pooky Knightsmith, here are some key points you might find useful if your child (or any other child who comes to you) ever becomes distressed and wants to talk with you.

1. Listen to understand

- Create a space / environment where a child can be heard and where they can tell THEIR story in THEIR own words. The child should be creating the conversation.
- Let them know you will not judge them - be explicit about this. e.g. "Nothing you tell me will make me like / respect you any less."
- Be wholly present and wholly focused on the child. Listening wholly for just a short while can make a **HUGE** difference to them.
- Make use of silences - try not to fill gaps, Silences may give the child to work through what is going through their head. Remaining silent will encourage the child to fill the silence and continue telling their story.
- Give child options after a minute of silence e.g. "Are you happy for me to speak now or shall we stay quiet for a while longer?"
- Avoid predicting or making assumptions - this will disempower the child.

Listening to understand is not about listening to respond.

- ❖ It is **NOT** about giving advice.
- ❖ It is **NOT** thinking about what to say next.
- ❖ It is **NOT** interpreting and laying your own emotions over the top.

2. Walk With Them

- Be kind to yourself. It is not about fixing the problem - this is not always possible - it is about listening and validating their concerns and worries. It is about making them feel like they are NOT alone.
- Help things feel a bit different right NOW; help them understand the right NOW; help them feel less alone right NOW, all by listening and walking with them.

3. Talk about the taboos

- Embrace the awkward as it can:
 - ❖ Help build bridges
 - ❖ Help us understand what is happening for them and help them take first steps towards alternative behaviours.
 - ❖ Can kick start their motivation to change; children can become desensitised to their behaviours and conversations- saying it out loud can bring realisation.
- Remember that starting to help a child unpick that = starting to help a child to change that.
- Use these sentence / conversation starters to help your child feel at ease:
 - ❖ Help me understand how it feels when ...
 - ❖ It makes me feel sad ...
 - ❖ I wish you could be kinder to yourself...
 - ❖ I would like us to work towards a time when you can ...

4. Say THANK YOU

- Use the power of 'thank you' to continue to make the child feel at ease about talking to you. Here are some ideas:
 - ❖ It took real bravery for you to open up. I feel hugely privileged that you chose me. Thank you.
 - ❖ Thank you for trusting me with this.
 - ❖ This conversation mattered a lot to me too. Thank you.

5. Something is better than nothing

- Conversations can sometimes evoke strong emotions - this does not mean it is wrong, it might just mean waiting for calm.
- You are showing that you care and the child feels like they are not alone.
- Remember that you are the trusted, calm adult.