8 THINGS WE DO THAT CAN MAKE KIDS STOP TELLING US THINGS

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1 TRYING TO FIX IT BEFORE WE HAVE REALLY LISTENED

When we jump straight to advice, children can feel that we missed what they were trying to tell us.

INSTEAD: Hear the whole story first. Then ask, "Do you want help with this, or do you want me to listen?"

2 REACTING WITH SHOCK, ANGER OR PANIC

A big reaction can make children worry about what will happen if they tell us the rest.

INSTEAD: Keep your first response calm. "I'm glad you told me. Tell me more."

3 INTERRUPTING OR FINISHING THE STORY FOR THEM

When we jump in, correct details or assume we know what happened, children can give up trying to explain.

INSTEAD: Let them tell it in their own words. Pause before responding – they may have more to say.

4 ASKING TOO MANY QUESTIONS TOO QUICKLY

"Who was there? What did they say? Why didn't you tell someone? What happened next?" can start to feel like an interrogation.

INSTEAD: Slow it down. Ask one question at a time and give them time to answer.

5 DISMISSING SOMETHING BECAUSE IT SEEMS SMALL TO US

"That's nothing," "Don't worry about it" or "Just ignore them" can shut down a conversation we meant to make better.

INSTEAD: Take seriously what matters to them. "That sounds like it really bothered you."

6 TELLING THEM HOW THEY SHOULD FEEL

"You shouldn't be upset" or "There's nothing to be scared of" does not make the feeling disappear. It can make it harder to talk about.

INSTEAD: Name what you are hearing without judging it. "It sounds like that really scared you."

7 PUSHING THEM TO TALK BEFORE THEY ARE READY

Repeatedly asking "What's wrong?" can make some children retreat further when they need time to find the words.

INSTEAD: Leave the door open. "You don't have to tell me now. I'm here when you're ready."

8 ONLY REALLY LISTENING WHEN SOMETHING IS WRONG

Stories about a game, a joke or what happened at lunch may seem unimportant to us, but they are part of a child's world.

INSTEAD: Listen to the little things too. How we respond to the small stories helps children decide whether to bring us the big ones.

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8 Things We Do That Can Make Kids Stop Telling Us Things

Eight practical communication reminders are brought together in this child-friendly adult listening poster. It names responses that can unintentionally discourage children from speaking, such as minimising their concerns, panicking, interrupting or pressing for answers, and pairs each one with a more helpful response.

Parents, carers, teachers, pastoral staff and professionals working with children can use it during parenting support, family meetings, safeguarding conversations or reflective team discussions. Printing the poster provides a quick prompt to listen calmly, validate feelings, give children time and show that they can return to the conversation when they are ready.