

## **Listening To Your Child**

Do you stop and listen when your child has an opinion to share? An opinion about war? Climate change? Politics? The environment? Kindness? God?

Are you dismissive? Do you feel the need to impose your views; to pass your wisdom on to the next generation? Or are you able to engage in interesting discussion, listening, really listening, to what your child/children have to say?

There would not be many of us who have not heard of young environmental activist Greta Thunberg and her strong views on climate change, gaining international recognition by calling young people to action all around the world. Exceptional in her passion and approach she certainly is, but not really any more remarkable than many of our forward thinking young people grappling with how their future world might look.

It is easy to be distracted by the negative behaviours, attitudes and issues with which our young people so often present and to forget how responsible, socially aware and passionate they can be. Our children are our leaders/doctors/scientists/politicians/teachers and decision makers of tomorrow and preparing them for these roles begins when they are young. We both want and need for them to be passionate, creative and innovative thinkers, and we start training them by listening, really listening, to what they have to say.

Quite apart from playing your role in building strong, confident and resilient leaders of tomorrow, by listening respectfully to your children you will be building bonds and building trust with your child today. You will be empowering them to speak up when they have needs and concerns. You will be giving them the courage and confidence to defend themselves and to speak in defence of others. You will be fostering a sense of justice and fair play by modelling listening to and respecting another's point of view.

You need not be afraid to disagree with what they say but listen with an open mind and an open heart, prepared to withhold judgement as you hear them out. In doing so you demonstrate your care and concern and your respect for them.

Children feel valued when they sense you think their point of view is important. Children who feel valued and believe they have something of worth to offer experience enhanced well-being and stronger mental health. They are less likely to be easily influenced by others. Listening is a foundation stone for building strong, resilient and compassionate children.

If you are interested in some further reading on how to develop good communication skills with your children visit Your Mind Matters/Parent Matters/ Raising Children Network and type "communication" into the search bar. Here you will find a host of articles suited to different age groups.

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