**Communication with children**

* **Be interested. Look interested.** Look into the eyes of the speaker. Sit or crouch down to be at their level. Face the speaker directly; if you are both sitting, lean forward slightly. Actions speak louder than words. Let your body say, “I’m interested!”
* **Put aside judgement and criticism.** Get into their experience and feelings; get inside their shoes and try to understand what happened. Put yourself and your own concerns aside. Don’t think about what you’ll say next.
* **Be aware of nonverbal cues.** Note the speed and inflection of the voice; the sighs and gulps; posture; the eyes glazing over or tearing. Reading between the lines gives you important information.
* **Let them finish.** Don’t interrupt. While you are the listener, let the speaker do the talking. At times it may be okay to briefly interject something if it enhances the other’s story. It’s also fair to ask them to repeat a point you’re not clear on. Remember, however, that the speaker has the ball; do not take it away. This may be difficult for those who are used to communicating competitively – impatiently waiting for a comma, then jumping in. Give them the kind of attention that you enjoy. It’s a gift that says, “I care about you,” “You are important to me.” You’ll get your turn afterward.

If you have actively listened, you have gathered much information. You noticed body language; you probably figured out the feelings involved – you know what you would have felt if this had happened to you.

* Reflect the feeling(s) back to the other person, from his or her point of view. For example, “I’ll bet you were scared,” or “You must have been really excited,” or “You must feel \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.” This direct response to them about their experience completes the transaction.

If you reflected accurately, the speaker will probably breathe a sigh of relief at being understood or perhaps will exclaim excitedly, “Yes, that’s right!” If you have not reflected accurately, the speaker has an opportunity to clear the misunderstanding. The need for a response is so important that little children may repeat a statement over and over and over again until the parent comments. The response lets them know that they were heard. The transaction is complete.