

How to listen to get my child to talk was a mystery I couldn't solve when my children were young. I mean, how to get your child to REALLY talk so you knew what was going on at times when you knew something was going on.

Whatever the age of your child, here's what I wish I'd known when my children were young.

Since writing the article about a child not wanting to go to school, I've had several interesting discussions. And I remembered my own son becoming so upset about nursery school that eventually I took him out. Some months later, when he was settled in primary school, we drove past the previous school and he said,

'Oh, that's where I used to go to school. I didn't want to go because they wanted me to be in the Christmas play.'

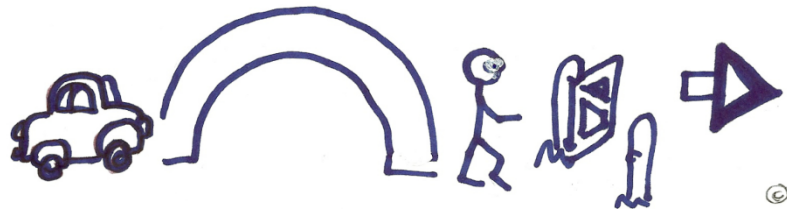
Here he was telling me exactly what the problem was – but months earlier, nothing I'd tried helped me to find out what was wrong. I just had a child who was so upset that nothing worked when it came to leaving him at school.

What I wish I'd known then was how to connect so he could tell me his story. (And I was an experienced teacher – so it wasn't that I didn't know anything about relating to children).

Here's a coaching tool to unlock communication that I wish I'd known back then.

What's needed is to:

PARK, CONNECT, FOCUS, EVOKE and PLAN.



Whether the issue is bullying, child unhappy at school, sibling rivalry or whatever, what happens with us parents is we often try to miss steps 1- 4 and rush in with PLAN (i.e. find solutions)

What our child needs is to 'feel felt' – to experience that we're connecting with what it's like from his perspective.

So often we try to imagine the problem.

We try to do something helpful.

But when your child senses you don't 'get him', he just keeps up the non-communication barriers or the 'unreason-able' behaviour.

He's not trying to be difficult, he's battling to make sense of things himself.
He needs to experience that you're there for him.

'Well, of course I'm there for him,' I would have replied.



What I didn't get then was that to really 'be there for him' the first thing I need to do is PARK my own agenda.

And as a parent, my agenda was often 'Fix it.'

We want instant 'sort it out.'

But some things need time, some things need to be processed.

Just as the most successful doctors are those who listen first to you, who hear what you think, what's concerning you, what you know is needed – that's what our child needs too.

So PARK your agenda: your desire for a quick fix, your desire to try to reason that he really likes school / that he has lots of friends/ that his sister likes school. None of your information is likely to be helpful for him, at this point.

PARK your frustration, your worries that you have to make this better.

Put yourself in neutral.

Choose to see your child's situation with compassion and yet without emotionally hooking in.

Imagine if the doctor became upset that he couldn't 'fix you' – you would lose all sense of trust and safety with him.

So PARK everything that's about you - your desires, your emotions, your solutions.

Choose to put that all aside and just be present to your child.

When I'm 'parked' I can be present to CONNECT with him.



Not just at head level but at heart level too.

He needs to know I'm there for him.

That this is a safe space to share any worries, any upset or angry feelings and just let those feelings be.

Sometimes for instance, your child might be missing you or missing the freedom of doing what he wants to do when he wants to do it.

It might not mean anything is wrong – but he still needs to grieve the loss of things the way they were.

You trying to 'fix it' is not giving him the space to be with his sad feelings.

Sometimes just being emotionally present to his experience may be all that's needed.

CONNECT involves many different and subtle elements.

If you'd like to learn more, [Parent Coach training](#) teaches the practical skills of how to CONNECT. So your child chooses to bring the issue to you.

You consciously choose to be in PARK mode and you establish the CONNECT. Only now can we FOCUS on the issue that's worrying him.

We need to FOCUS on what's going on for our child, from his perspective.



Again these are coaching skills to learn. But one tip is avoid the 'why' question.

'Why don't you want to go to school?' doesn't usually work.

Try using 'What' questions.

'What is it about school you don't like?'

or

'So if you didn't have to go to school what would you do instead?'

Being in CONNECT mode means that you are accepting his answer, not trying to talk him out of it / fix it.

Just listening to his response.



As we PARK, CONNECT and FOCUS on his issue, we EVOKE a response.

In different situations this response is different.

If he's emotionally upset, there may be tears or frustrated feelings that need to erupt and be sympathetically 'held' before any thinking can happen.

The tears we cry when we are upset are chemically different to the tear we cry when we peel an onion. The 'upset' tears contain stress hormones. Only when he's been able to release the stress will he be able to think reason-ably.

Your connected and compassionate listening can EVOKE your child to think more clearly and tell you what's needed.



You'll intuitively sense when he's ready to help find solutions. This is the PLAN stage.

Not for you to be the 'fix-it' parent but to coach him to solution finding.

If it's his solution, he's far more likely to make it work.

Again, the 'what' questions are likely to be helpful.

Obviously the question needs to be carefully made to fit the unique challenge.

Insightful questions create insightful answers.

Perhaps your presence EVOKES a response that he doesn't like school because he doesn't know how to cut with the scissors.

You might ask,

'What could we do that could help you learn to cut with the scissors?'

And very often 'And what else?' can evoke more insight.

Sometimes a child can still seem stuck for an answer.

Perhaps his favourite teddy is sitting on the bed as you're chatting.

Asking Teddy the 'what question' and then passing Teddy to the child so that Teddy can 'talk' can create the breakthrough that's needed.

Of course, there is the occasion when the Parent's wisdom might be needed too. But don't jump in with your planning if you can possibly evoke the thought from him.

If it's his solution and he's actively involved in the planning, it's far more likely to work.

And what's happened now is we've shifted him from the 'victim' mode to realising that he can create his solutions.

When we coach our child in the 'little' upsets, we build the confidence and the skills and trust that will help him navigate bigger storms in later years.

What I'm suggesting isn't easy. It takes time, skill and practice on your part. It's like learning a foreign language. If you only know a few phrases, it's not going to work for you.

If you're living in Ireland or nearby, I'm inviting you to join a [Koemba course](#).

I'll be sharing the skills and insights that I wish I'd known when my children were young.

Only when you build up your new vocabulary, and learn how to use the language in practical situations, will you realise its richness and your new possibilities, to help your children think more clearly, connect more compassionately and behave more response-ably.