

# Acknowledge

**To connect with a child of any age, curb anxiety or tantrums and possibly even prevent them- acknowledgement is the key.** It's a simple but surprisingly challenging thing to do and particularly tough to remember in the heat the moment...

Before you tell your child that it's time to leave the park, or remind him that the game he's examining has to stay at the store, acknowledge his point of view. **Acknowledge your child's feelings and wishes, even if they seem ridiculous, irrational, self-centered or wrong.** This is not the same as agreeing, and is definitely not indulgent or allowing an undesirable behavior.

**Acknowledgement isn't condoning our child's actions; it's validating the feelings behind them.** It's a simple, profound way to reflect our child's experience and inner self. It demonstrates our understanding and acceptance. It sends a powerful, affirming message to the brain as well as the heart...you are heard and loved.

**Acknowledging is simple, but it isn't easy.** It's counter-intuitive for most of us, even when we've done it thousands of times. Won't acknowledging our child's wishes make matters worse? Won't saying "I know how much you want a cookie, but we have an orange today." make our toddler hold on to the idea longer, cry harder? Wouldn't it be better to dismiss or downplay the child's feelings, distract or redirect?

Our fears about an honest acknowledgement of the situation "making things worse" are almost always unfounded. **Feeling heard and understood allows children to release the feelings, let go and move on.** Here are more reasons that acknowledging our child's truth is worth the conscious effort it takes...

## **1. Acknowledging can stop tears and tantrums in their tracks.**

I have witnessed this many, many times. Whether a child is upset about an injury, a disagreement with another child or anger over a conflict with a parent, acknowledging to the child what happened or that he is hurt, frustrated or angry can miraculously ease the pain. Feeling understood is a powerful thing.

## **2. Acknowledging, instead of judging or "fixing", fosters trust and encourages children to keep sharing their feelings.**

Parents and caregivers have an enormous influence, and their responses have an impact on young children. If, for example, we try to calm children by assuring them that there's no need to be upset or worried about something that's troubling them, they may become less inclined to express their feelings. If our goal is our child's emotional health and keeping the door of communication open – just acknowledging is the best policy. "Daddy left and you are sad." or "You didn't make the team and you are hurt and disappointed?"

## **3. Acknowledging informs, encourages language development and emotional intelligence.**

Children gain clarity about their feelings and desires when we verbally reflect them. But don't state the feeling unless you're sure. It's safer to use the words "upset" or "bothered" rather than jumping to "scared", "angry", etc. When in doubt, you might ask, "Did it make you mad when Joey wouldn't let you use his blocks?" "Did the dog's bark frighten you or just surprise you?"

## **4. Acknowledging illuminates, helps us understand and empathize.**

To state our child's point of view, we have to first see it, so acknowledging helps to give us clarity. When we say, "You want me to keep playing this fun game with you, but I'm too tired", we are encouraged to empathize with our child's point-of-view (and he ours).

## **5. Acknowledging struggles might be all the encouragement your child needs to carry on.**

Rather than saying, "you can do it!", which can create pressure and set the child up to believe he disappoints us, try saying, "You are working very hard, and you're making progress. That's tough to do. It's frustrating, isn't it?"

**Acknowledging proves that we are paying attention, makes a child feel understood, accepted, deeply loved and supported.**

To learn about parent coaching or for more training on this topic,  
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