

Give children some time to settle in and relax. Spend some time eating a snack with your child, watching TV, or just relaxing while you pay attention to your child and listen.

Reflective Listening

Start by using reflective listening statements such as the following:

- Tell me about the play you've been practicing.
- What do you like to do at recess?
- Wow, I can see that you are excited; tell me why.

Opening Conversations With Young Children

Young children respond well to closed-ended questions about their day. They have trouble answering a question such as "How was your day?" It is too vague and will usually result in a brief answer, such as "Fine."

Try one of these examples:

- Who did you eat lunch with today?
- Did you have gym today?
- Who did you play with on the playground?
- Did you go on the swing?
- Was your friend Cameron on the bus?

Opening Conversations With Adolescents

Older children respond well to open-ended yet direct questions, such as the following:

- How was math class today?
- Seems like you enjoy track; tell me about it!
- Did you see your friend Jon today at school? How did that go?
- What did you do during your breaks today at school?

Giving Choices to Keep Communication Going

Giving choices is another way to gather information from children. Questions that do not give a choice (e.g., "Are you mad?") can lead to defensiveness and limit discussion.

Consider these examples:

- Would you say you are more mad or sad?
- If 10 is really mad, and 1 is not mad at all, how mad are you?