

Why Is My Child Like This?

The Power of Perspective Taking in Parenting

My two children were fighting. Again.

“Abbie, what is going on?” Abbie described how Chanel teased her, was mean, and was hurting her. “Chanel, is that true?” I asked the older of the two girls. Her reply was instant. Without meeting my eyes, she said, “No”.

“Chanel, if I were to ask you to pretend to be Abbie and I had you describe what went on, what would you say to me?” Chanel reluctantly took Abbie’s perspective and acknowledged that Abbie would say that “Chanel teased me, was mean, and hurt me.”

A man spoke to a famous speaker after a conference about relationships. “I can’t understand my son. He won’t listen to me.”

The speaker responded, “Let me say back to you what I just heard you tell me. You can’t understand your son because he won’t listen to you.”

“That’s right”, the man confirmed.

The speaker reiterated, “Let me say it again. *You* can’t understand *your son* because *he* won’t listen to *you*.” He paused as the man stared at him. Then he added, “I thought that to understand your son, *you* need to listen to *him*.”

I’ve heard many exasperated parents ask me variations on the same question. “Why is my child like this? Why do they do that? Why can’t they just listen and understand?”

As adults, we have a lot more life experience than children. We’ve seen more, learned more, and faced more challenges. It’s easy to forget what it’s like to see the world

through a child's eyes. Yet when our children feel understood, truly listened to, life works better—for them and for us.

How to Better Understand Your Child's Perspective

- **Remember what it was like to be a child.** Think back to your own childhood experiences. What were your fears and worries? What challenges did you face?
- **Listen attentively to your child.** Pay attention to what they say and how they say it. Try to understand their feelings and point of view.
- **Ask questions to gain clarity.** Don't assume you know what they're thinking or feeling. Ask open-ended questions to encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Be patient and understanding.** Children are still learning and growing. They may not always have the words to express themselves clearly.
- **Avoid dismissing their feelings.** Even if their worries seem small to you, they are very real to your child.

Sharing Your Perspective in a Helpful Way

- **Offer comfort and reassurance.** Let your child know that you're there for them.
- **Share your own experiences (in an age-appropriate way).** This can help them understand that challenges are a normal part of life and that they can overcome them.
- **Help them develop coping strategies.** Teach them healthy ways to deal with stress and difficult emotions, such as deep breathing, talking about their feelings, or engaging in physical activity.

By remembering to see the world through your child's eyes, you can build a stronger connection with them and help them navigate life's challenges with confidence.



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