Session 8

HELPING CHILDREN EXPRESS THEIR FEELINGS

When talking to a child, **DO**:

- **Actively listen:**
  - Use encouraging remarks.
  - Be aware of your body language.
  - Maintain eye contact.
  - Repeat back what the child said.

- **Use open-ended questions:**
  - What happened next?
  - How did you feel when that happened?
  - What did you think when that happened?
  - And then what?

- **Praise and be supportive:**
  - I’m so glad you told me that made you feel ____________.
  - It was brave to talk about feeling scared.
  - I’m proud of you for telling me how you feel.
  - Thank you for telling me you are angry with me.

- **Conduct the conversation in private:**
  - Be aware of other children or adults.
  - Respect the child’s privacy.

- **Use developmentally appropriate language:**
  - Try to repeat the child’s own words.
  - Clarify the child’s terms.

When talking to a child, **DON’T**:

- **Ask leading questions:**
  - Someone hurt you, didn’t they?
  - You’re mad aren’t you?
  - You don’t want to live here anymore, do you?
  - You don’t really like that, right?
- **Blame or judge the child or use empty threats:**
  You better get your act together or else.
  Why didn't you tell me about that sooner?
  You know you weren't supposed to tell your mom about that.
  You're turning out just like your brother.

- **Pressure the child:**
  If you don't tell me about ______
  You'd better tell me about ______ if you want to ______.
  You can't go home unless you tell me about what your mom did.

- **Invalidate the child's feelings:**
  It's silly to feel that way.
  Don't be angry.
  You shouldn't worry about that.
  That's nothing to be upset about.

- **Make promises you can't keep:**
  No one will ever hurt you again.
  I promise to keep you safe.
  I'll visit you every week.

**HOMEWORK**

Review the above guidelines and use them to actively engage your child in a conversation about something positive or neutral at least two times during the week to come. Later, with therapist support, you can apply these listening guidelines to more challenging conversations with your child.