



## **Help kids express emotions through dialoguing**

- Mirroring – paraphrase it back
- Validation – have I got that right?
- Empathy – express understanding

Dialoguing is a method we use when kids are having a hard time managing their emotions – negative or positive. It’s a constructive way for them to get their feelings out in the open and have them validated by an adult. With practice, kids learn how to express their emotions appropriately.

Remember – you can mirror, validate and express empathy even if you disagree with what the child did or why!

### **Here’s how it works when you’re dialoguing with a child:**

Mirroring: “So, you are telling me that you kicked the chair when you got angry at Bridget for taking away your ball?”

Validation: “Have I got that right? I can see that you are really feeling mad about not being able to play with the basketball. Is there more?”

Empathy: “I can imagine that you must feel really angry that you can’t play basketball when you’ve been waiting all day to get outside. That must be very frustrating.”

### **Why it Works**

Mirroring is the process of accurately reflecting back the content of a message from someone with whom you are talking. The most common form of mirroring is paraphrasing. A paraphrase is a statement in your own words of what the message a child sends means to you.

It indicates that you are willing to transcend your own thoughts and feelings for the moment and attempt to understand the child from her/his point of view.

Any response made prior to mirroring is often an interpretation and may contain a misunderstanding. Mirroring allows a child to send a message and permits you to paraphrase until you understand.

Validation is a communication that the information being received and mirrored makes sense. It indicates that you can see her/his point of view and can accept its validity – it is true for the child. Validation is a temporary suspension or transcendence of your point of view that allows the child’s experience to have his own reality.

### **Phrases to Use**

Typical validating phrases are, “I can see that ...” or “You make sense to me because ....”  
Or “I can understand that ...”

Such phrases convey to the child that the subjective experience has its own logic and is a valid way of looking at things. To validate a child’s message does not mean that you agree

with her/his point or view or that it reflects your subjective experience. It recognizes the fact that in any communication between two people, there are always two points of view.

Empathy is the process of reflecting, imagining or participating in the feelings the child is experiencing about the situation. This deep level of communication attempts to recognize, reach into and, on some level, experience the emotions of the child.

**Phrases to Use**

Typical phrases for empathic communication include: “And I can imagine that you must feel ...” or “When you experience that, I hear ...” or “I understand that you feel ....” Or “That makes sense to me.”