Social-Emotional Health

Special Education Services

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Active Listening

During stressful times, even children who are usually calm may struggle with anxiety. Scary media reports, disruptions to routines, and exposure to adult conversations about a "mysterious" health threat can all contribute to confusion and anxiety.

Children's anxiety can manifest in many ways including disrupted sleep, stomach aches, and behavioural changes. Often children are unable to easily describe the feelings or thoughts that are impacting their social and emotional well-being.

Active Listening is an effective approach to helping children talk about things that may be difficult for them to put into words. By encouraging dialogue, children can often provide parents with some insight into their confusion and fears, and an opportunity for parents to help them manage these feelings.

What is Active Listening?

- When you notice your child feeling anxious, ask about it. By asking, your child will understand that it is okay to talk about these feelings.
- If your child does not respond right away, do not push for an immediate response. Give your child time. "I'm here to listen whenever you are ready…"
- When your child starts speaking, resist the urge to jump in right away. You want to make sure you completely understand what your child is telling you.
- Restate what your child says so that he knows that you are trying to understand. "It sounds like you are saying…"
- Validate your child's willingness or effort to describe how he is feeling. "I appreciate that you are trying so hard to talk about this…"
- The feelings and thoughts that your child expresses will give you important insight into how to best help them through this difficult period.
- Finally, it is important that parents take necessary steps to manage their own anxiety. Children will likely feel safe to the degree that their parents feel safe and in control of emotions.