

Noticing

Most of children's experience with adults is about being monitored - guided, protected, corrected, reminded, lectured. While many of these interactions are important and keep children safe and sound, they rarely contribute to a child's self-esteem and gladness to be alive. What really builds their self-esteem We can create this experience by telling them what we are noticing, understanding, and appreciating as we become aware of it.

"you decided / you chose / you figured out / you discovered / you know about / you know how to / you put a lot of effort into / you worked really hard ..."

In play therapy this is called reflection on a child's actions, or 'tracking'. You may have heard it called 'doubling' or 'sports-casting' in other contexts. What helps children thrive is to have the consistent experience of being simply noticed and enjoyed for who they are and what they are doing, thinking and feeling in the present moment.

We can create this experience when having a conversation with them by paraphrasing in our own words what we understand they are saying to us. This is called reflective or active listening.

How noticing an infant or toddler might sound

"You're squeezing the banana and spreading it all over your face!"

"You picked up the book." "You're giving me the book!" "You want me to read it to you."

"You pushed the blocks over. You think that's funny"

"You're smiling and laughing. You like playing peek-a-boo!"

How noticing or tracking might sound with a pre-schooler – putting into words their intentions, motivations or feelings.

Adult – "You've lined up those on the floor. Looks like you're making a ..."

Adult – "Oh, you're checking my heart. You know how that (pretend stethoscope) works."

Adult – "No wonder you know about that. You've been to the doctors."

Adult – "You rode on a train, had lunch on a train and you like to make trains out of the blocks."

How noticing might sound with older children

"I can see you've put a lot of time into this drawing. There is a lot of detail and use of colour."

"I've noticed that you created some new ways of playing that game."

"I can see that you really care about your friend, you want to find a way to help them."

It is even more important to notice a child's feelings with phrases like:

"you look really disappointed / you seem sad / I can tell you're angry / you are really enjoying..."

"You don't want to get into the bath. You're worried the water is too hot or too cold".

"You really like cherries, you've eaten every last one!"

Adult - "You are feeling sad that your friend can't come and play today."

Adult - "You are feeling angry that I said no more TV."

Adult - "You are not sure. You're not ready for me to leave yet."

Adult – "You are really disappointed that there are no more balloons."

"I know you didn't really like doing that job. I really appreciate the effort you put into it."