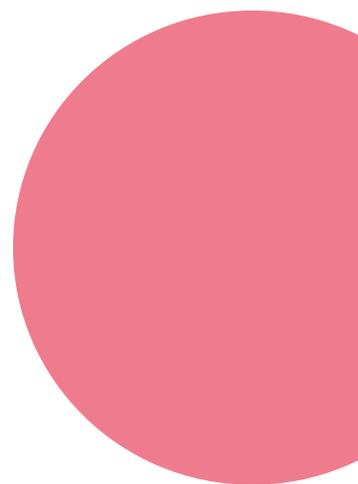


*Helping  
you to help  
your child*

# Getting to Why: Ideas for Asking & Listening

Ideas for parents, carers and other  
supporting adults to help get to the heart of  
a child's issues



Unless we understand the 'why', it's hard to provide effective help

## Introduction

Unless we can understand why a child is e.g. self-harming, it's very unlikely we'll succeed in supporting them to sustainably change this behaviour. Getting to the 'why' can be challenging as children often don't know what's driving their behaviour. That's where this guide comes in.

In this guide, I've shared ideas for getting to why through conversations with your child. If helpful, in future guides, I can explore other methods like journalling, play, music or art.

Cherry-pick the ideas that you think might work for you and give them a go. You can always revisit others later if you need to.

Good luck!

*Pooky x*

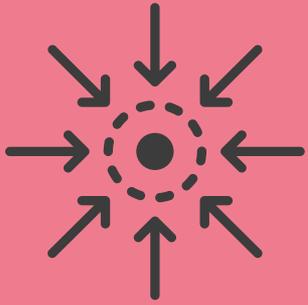
# Listen to Understand

Learning to be a better listener is the first step before we engage with any of the other ideas in this guide. Listening is something that we can all get a little better at because it's very natural for us to want to jump in and fill the gaps in conversations, or to want to provide a solution to a problem which hasn't been fully outlined yet, or to make a guess at the story being told when it's still in the process of being told.

In short, our love and the human condition can get in the way of brilliant listening. On the next page are some simple tips for the kind of listening that will enable your child to feel safe, supported, seen and heard. The subsequent page includes ideas for creating listening moments with your child at times and in places when they might be more receptive to a deeper conversation.



# Listening to Understand



## Focus

Close all open brain tabs. Visibly remove distractions. Phone away. Computer off

## Be Curious

Step into their world and ask open questions, avoid sounding judgemental



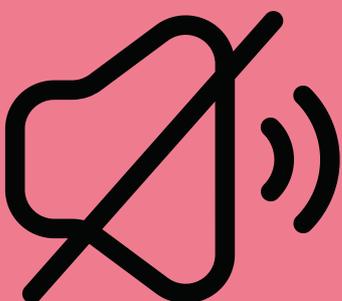
## Validate

Identify and acknowledge their feelings and experiences. Offer frequent reassurance



## Reflect

Use your own words to show you're listening and to check understanding



## Silence

Embrace silences. Wait for them to fill the gaps even if it feels awkward

# Listening Moments



## Walk & Talk

Walking side by side allows the conversation to flow and silences feel less awkward

## Chat Habit

Get in the habit of having a little chat at the same time each day, just before bed works well



## In the Car

In the car, our children know they have us to themselves and side by side feels less scary

## Busy Alongside

If your child is busy with e.g. homework be busy but interruptible (e.g. cleaning) nearby



## Agree a Signal

Can you agree a signal that your child wants a chat e.g. an emoji they could text you?



# Open Questions

-2-

Open questions are any question that can't be answered with a one word or very short answer... yes, no, three days, blue...

Open questions require the person answering to dig a little deeper and provide a little more detail in their answer. This can be a good way to begin to open out a conversation and encourage your child to talk more about an issue that you're exploring together.

You don't have to get into the tough stuff right away, you might ask less sensitive questions whilst you're building rapport, and getting used to the rhythm of conversation, and proving to your child that you're listening and interested (whilst you build up your nerve for the tougher conversation ahead).



*Open question suggestions on the next page*



# Open Questions *General*

What would happen if...?

I wonder why...?

Can you tell me more about...?

In what way could...?

What do you think about...?

What do you think X thinks about...?

How did that happen?

What could be done differently?

What should our plan be?

Can you think of other ways to...?

What would you like to happen next?

What worked well?

# Exploratory Questions

If you want to get to the heart of the matter, you'll need to ask some questions that dig a little deeper and really begin to explore what is going on with your child.

None of these questions will provide the magic answer you're looking for, but as you and your child explore more and more about their feelings and experiences, you'll start to paint a rich tapestry of understanding.

You can ask these questions aloud, or you might find it helpful to use printed versions as prompts that you can both look at. Your child might also take these questions away as prompts for journalling.

I've included questions on the next page using self-harm as an example that could be asked aloud or printed.



# Questions to Print & Answer Together

Can you tell me about the first time you hurt yourself?

In what way would you like things to feel or be different?

How do you feel before you self-harm?

Have you noticed any patterns or triggers to your self-harm?

Does hurting yourself make you feel better in any way? Can you try to explain?

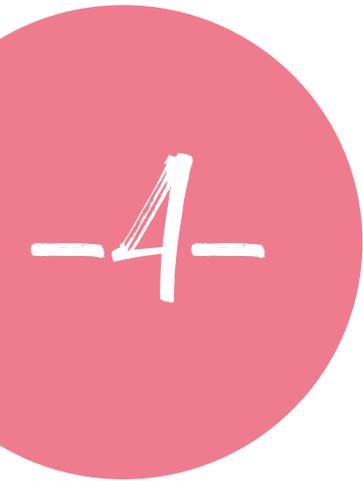
Have there been any times when you felt the urge to self-harm but didn't? What happened?

How do you feel when you look at your injuries?

What do you think other people think? What do you think I think?

How do you feel talking to me about this?

What would a good day be like - walk me through from the moment you wake up



# Closed Questions

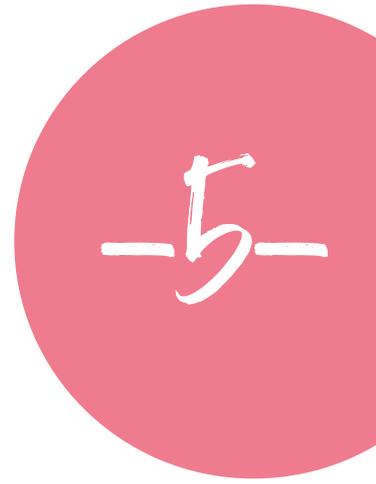
Closed questions (those that only require a short answer: yes, no, Monday, twelve) have their place too. Sometimes they can help us to get to the heart of the matter and sometimes they can provide respite if the conversation feels very heavy and your child needs a breather for a moment or two.

You could ask questions like:

- » Did you have biology today?
- » Was Gemma at school today?
- » When are you meeting Miss Abbott?
- » Did you enjoy games today?
- » Who did you hang out with at lunchtime?

# Lists

Making lists together can be a really interesting way to explore your child's experience. Lists can feel a bit less challenging to create than free writing or speaking as they bring a structure with them and feel finite.



You can make lists about anything including some pretty light-hearted stuff that might provide ways in, such as favourite films or ice cream flavours.

Lists can help you get to the heart of the matter too and can be used to explore triggers and challenges e.g. ten things that make me angry.

Once made, lists can be re-ordered or prioritised which can add further depth to the conversation. Or you can make a list about home and a list about school... there are lots of possibilities.

I've included some list templates to get you started and some blank ones for your own questions.



# Light Hearted Lists to Get You Talking

Films I love

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Nice smells

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Noises I hate

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Kind things to do

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

# Lists that Dive a Little Deeper

People I trust

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Anger triggers

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

I'd like to change

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

Things that help

1

---

2

---

3

---

4

---

5

---

# Blank Lists for Your Own Ideas

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

1

2

3

4

5

# 6

## Rating and Ranking

Rating and ranking exercises can help to open a conversation out and get to the heart of experiences and opinions.

There are lots of ways of doing these but the simplest is to start with a range of statements and either rank each from 1 (not at all) to 10 (totally), or to chop up a range of statements and put them on the table and move them around to rank them in order of importance.

Printing and sharing these kinds of statements might feel a bit odd if you're supporting your own child, but they can provide a useful hook for the conversation if your child is up for it. Some children will also appreciate how hard you're trying. If your child doesn't engage, it can be helpful to 'forget' to pick up the statements, they'll often come back to them and consider them in their own time.

I've included some suggested statements and some blank templates so you and your child can write your own.



# Statements to Rank & Explore

I feel well supported

I have good coping strategies

I have a lot of worries

I have adults I can trust

There are places I feel safe

Sometimes I feel calm and/or happy

I am often angry

No one understands me

I have kind friends

I have things to look forward to

# Statements to Rank & Explore

Rate each statement, 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is absolutely

# Prompting Further Talk



With all of the ideas we've explored in this guide, we can open the conversation out further still by making use of small prompts and questions that we can return to often.

These prompts and mini questions will prompt our child to keep talking and dig a little deeper into their thinking... this might be as simple as a well-placed 'Why?'

Here are some of my favourites:

- » Why?
- » Tell me more...
- » What happened next?
- » How did that feel?
- » Was that expected?
- » What do you think XX was thinking?
- » Did anything surprise you?
- » Do you think they did the right thing?
- » Would you do it that way again?
- » What went well?
- » What could have been better?
- » Keep going!

# Works Best When

It's important you find the way that works best for you and your child, but a few things that can really help include:

Make a habit of listening and your child will make a habit of talking

## - Make it a Habit -

Make a habit of listening to your child and they'll get into a habit of opening up to you. Listen about the little stuff and in time they'll talk to you about the big stuff too.

## - Open & Honest -

Aim for an open and honest relationship with your child that is free from judgement and full of curiosity. That will mean encouraging and answering their questions of you too.

## - Love Out Loud -

You cannot tell your child that you love them too often. Sometimes we feel love so deeply that we forget to spell it out. Don't forget, tell your child often exactly what you most love about them. They may really need to hear this.

Helping  
you to help  
your child

- Thank You! -

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Pooky x

