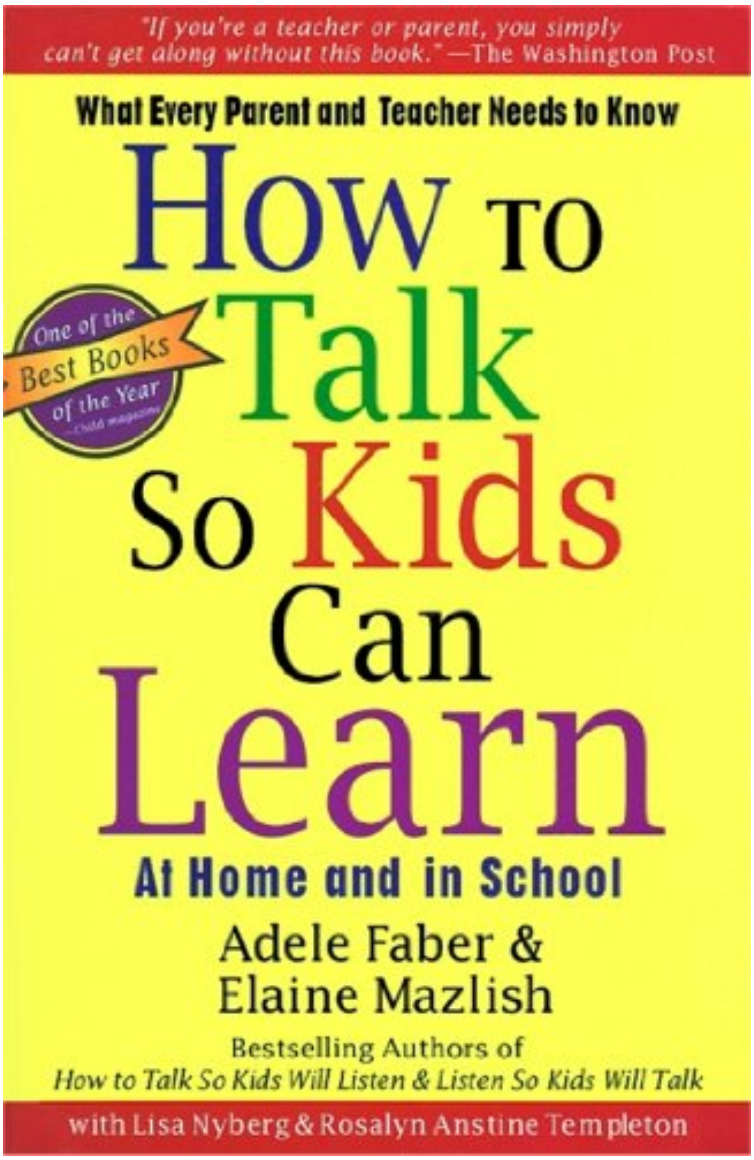
How To Talk So Kids Can Learn (English Edition)



Par Adele Faber, Elaine Mazlish
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[Download] How To Talk So Kids Can Learn (English Edition)

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Description : Description du produit The leading experts on parent-child communication show parents and teachers how to motivate kids to learn and succeed in school. Using the unique communication strategies, down-to-earth dialogues, and delightful cartoons that are the hallmark of their multimillion-copy bestseller How to Talk So Kids Will Listen Listen So Kids Will Talk, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish show parents and teachers how to help children handle the everyday problems that interfere with learning. This breakthrough book demonstrates how parents and teachers can join forces to inspire kids to be self-directed, self-disciplined, and responsive to the wonders of learning.

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This breakthrough book demonstrates how parents and teachers can join forces to inspire kids to be self-directed, self-disciplined, and responsive to the wonders of learning.ExtraitChapter 1How to Deal with Feelings That Interfere with LearningIt was the memories of my own teachers -- both those I loved and those I hated -- that made me decide to become one.I had a long, mental list of all the mean things I would never say or do to my students and a clear vision of how infinitely patient and understanding I would be. All during my education courses in college, I held on to my conviction that I could teach kids in a way that would make them want to learn.My first day as a "real" teacher came as a shock. As much as I had planned and prepared, I was totally unprepared for these thirty-two sixth graders. Thirty-two kids with loud voices, high energy, and powerful wants and needs. Halfway through the morning the first rumblings began: "Who stole my pencil?!"..."Get out of my face!"..."Shut up. I'm tryin' to listen to the teacher!"I pretended not to hear and went on with the lesson, but the eruptions continued: "Why do I have to sit next to him?"..."I don't understand what we're supposed to do."..."He punched me!"..."She started it!"My head began to pound? The noise level in the room continued to rise. Words of "patience and understanding" died on my lips. This class needed a teacher who was in charge and in control. I heard myself saying:"Cut it out. Nobody stole your pencil.""You have to sit next to him because I said so.""I don't care who started it. I want it ended. Now!""What do you mean you don't understand? I just explained it.""I can't believe this class. You're acting like first graders. Will you please sit still!"One boy ignored me. He left his seat, walked over to the sharpener, and stood there grinding his pencil to a nub. In my firmest voice I ordered, "That's enough! Sit down right now!""You can't make me do nothin'," he said."We'll talk about this after school.""I can't stay. I ride the bus.""Then I'll need to call your parents to get this settled.""You can't call my parents. We don't got no phone."By three o'clock I was exhausted. The kids burst out of the classroom and spilled out onto the streets. More power to them. They were their parents' responsibility now. I'd done my time.I slumped in my chair and stared at the empty desks. What went wrong? Why wouldn't they listen? What did I have to do to get through to these kids?All during those first few months of teaching, the pattern was the same. I'd start each morning with high hopes and leave every afternoon feeling overwhelmed by the drudgery and tedium of having to drag my class through the required curriculum. But worse than anything, I was turning into the kind of teacher I never wanted to be -- angry, bossy, and belittling. And my students were becoming increasingly sullen and defiant. As the term wore on, I found myself wondering how long I could last.Jane Davis, the teacher next door, came to my rescue. The day after I poured my heart out to her, she stopped by my room and handed me her worn copy of How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk. "I don't know if this will help," she said, "but the skills in this book saved my sanity with my own kids at home. And they sure make a difference in my classroom!"I thanked her, put the book in my briefcase, and forgot about it. A week later I was lying in bed nursing a cold. Idly I reached for the book and opened it. The italicized words on the first page jumped out at me.Direct connection between how kids feel and how they behave.When kids feel right, they'll behave right.How do we help them to feel right?By accepting their feelings!I lay back on my pillow and closed my eyes. Did I accept my students' feelings? In my head I replayed some of the exchanges I'd had with the kids that week:Student: I can't write.Me: That's not true.Student: But I can't think of anything to write about.Me: Yes, you can! Just quit complaining and start writing.Student: I hate history. Who cares what happened a hundred years ago?Me: You should care. It's important to know your country's history.Student: It's boring.Me: No, it isn't! If you paid attention, you'd find it interesting.It was ironic. I was the one who was always preaching to the children about the right of each individual to his or her opinions and feelings. Yet in practice, whenever the kids expressed their feelings, I dismissed them. Argued with them. My underlying message was "You're wrong to feel what you feel. Listen to me instead."I sat up in bed and tried to remember. Did my teachers ever do that to me? There was that one time in high school when I was stricken over my first failing grade and my math teacher tried to give me a pep talk: "There's nothing to be upset about, Liz. It's not that you lack ability in geometry. You just haven't applied yourself. You have to make up your mind that you're going to do it. The trouble with you is, your attitude is bad."He was probably right, and I knew he meant well, but his words left me feeling stupid and inadequate. At one point I stopped listening and watched his mustache moving up and down and waited for him to finish so I could get away

from him. Is that what my students felt about me?Over the next few weeks I tried to respond more sensitively to my students' feelings, to reflect them accurately:"It's not easy to choose a topic you want to write about.""I hear how you feel about history. You're wondering why anyone would even care about what happened so long ago."It helped. I could see immediately that the kids experienced the difference. They nodded, looked me straight in the eye, and told me more. Then one day Alex announced, "I don't want to go to gym and no one can make me!" That was enough. I didn't hesitate for a minute. In icy tones I answered, "You will go to gym or you will go to the office!"Why was it so hard to acknowledge kids' feelings? At lunch I asked that same question aloud and told my friend Jane and the others at my table what I'd been reading and thinking about.Maria Estes, a parent volunteer, sprang to the defense of teachers. "There are so many children to teach," she said, "and so much to teach them. How can you expect yourself to worry about every little word?"Jane looked thoughtful. "Maybe," she said, "if the adults in our lives had worried a little about their words, we wouldn't have so much to unlearn today. Let's face it. We're products of our past. We speak to our students the way our parents and teachers spoke to us. I know, even with my own kids at home, it took me a long time to stop repeating the old script. It was a big step for me to go from 'That doesn't hurt. It's only a little scratch' to 'A scratch can hurt?'"Ken Watson, a science teacher, looked baffled. "Am I missing something?" he asked. "I don't see that it makes much difference."I thought hard, hoping to come up with an example that would let him experience the difference for himself. Then I heard Jane say, "Ken, imagine that you're a teenager and that you'd just made the school team -- basketball, football, whatever."Ken smiled. "Soccer," he said."Okay," Jane said, nodding, "now imagine you went to your first practice session, filled with enthusiasm, and the coach called you aside and told you that you were cut from the team."Ken groaned."A little later," Jane continued, "you see your homeroom teacher in the hallway and tell her what just happened. Now pretend that I'm that teacher. I'll respond to your experience in a number of different ways. Just for the heck of it, jot down what the kid inside you feels or thinks after each of my responses."Ken grinned, took out his pen, and reached for a paper napkin to write on.Here are the different approaches Jane tried with him:Denial of Feelings"You' re getting yourself all worked up over nothing. The world isn't going to come to an end because you didn't make some team. Forget about it."The Philosophical Response"Life isn't always fair, but you have to learn to roll with the punches."Advice"You can't let these things get you down. Try out for another team."Questions"Why do you think you were dropped? Were the other players better than you? What are you going to do now?"Defense of the Other Person"Try to see it from the coach's point of view. He wants to produce a winning team. It must have been tough for him to decide who to keep and who let go."Pity"Oh, you poor thing. I'm so sorry for you. You tried so hard to make the team, but you just weren't good enough. Now all the other kids know. I'll bet you could just die of embarrassment."Amateur Psychoanalysis"Did you ever consider that the real reason you were cut from the team was that your heart wasn't in your playing? I think that on a subconscious level you didn't want to be on the team, so you messed up on purpose."Ken threw up his hands. "Stop! Enough. I get the idea."I asked Ken if I could see what he had written. He tossed me the napkin. I read it aloud:"Don't tell me how to feel.""Don't tell me what to do.""You'll never understand.""You know what you can do with your questions!"0 "You're taking everybody's side but mine.""I'm a loser.""That's the last time I'll ever tell you anything.""Oh, dear," Mafia said. "A lot of those things that Jane just said to Ken sound like what I say to my son, Marco. So what could you do instead?""Acknowledge the child's distress," I answered quickly."How?" Maria asked.The words wouldn't come to me. I looked to Jane for help. She turned to Ken and fixed her eyes upon him. "Ken," she said, "to find that you were cut from the team when you were so sure you were on it must have been a big shock and a big disappointment!"Ken nodded. "It's true," he said. "It was a shock. And it was a disappointment. And frankly, it's a relief to have someone finally understand that simple fact."We all had a lot to say to each other after that. Maria confided that no one had ever acknowledged her feelings when she was growing up. Ken asked, "How are we supposed to give our students what we never had ourselves?" Clearly, we needed more practice if we wanted to become comfortable with this new way of responding to the children. I volunteered to bring in some examples showing how we could acknowledge feelings in the school setting. Here, in cartoon form, is what I worked out and brought to my lunch buddies a few days later.Ken looked at the illustrations and shook his head. "Theoretically, this all sounds wonderful, but to me it's just one more demand upon teachers. Where are we supposed to find the time to help students deal with their feelings?"Jane's eyes twinkled. "You make time," she said. "Get to school earlier, leave later, rush through lunch, and forget about bathroom breaks.""Yeah," Ken added, "and somewhere in between planning lessons, grading papers, developing bulletin boards, preparing for conferences -- and incidentally, teaching --

worry about what your students might be feeling or how to give them in fantasy what they can't have in reality."As I listened to Ken, I thought, "Maybe it is too much to ask of teachers."It was as if Jane had read my mind. "Seriously," she said, "I know it's a lot to ask of teachers, but I also know how important it is for children to feel understood. The plain fact is that when students are upset, they can't concentrate. And they certainly can't absorb new material. If we want to free their minds to think and learn, then we have to deal respectfully with their emotions.""And not just at school, but at home," Maria added emphatically.We all turned to look at her. "When I was about nine years old," she explained, "my family moved, and I had to go to a new school. My new teacher was very strict. Whenever I took an arithmetic test, she would hand it back to me with big black x's over every answer I got wrong. She made me bring my paper up to her desk again and again until I got it right. I was so nervous in her class, I couldn't think. Sometimes I even tried to copy the answers from other children. The night before a test, I always got a stomachache. I would say, 'Mama, I'm scared.' And she'd say, 'There's nothing to be scared of. Just do your best.' And my father would say, 'If you'd study, you wouldn't have to be scared.' Then I'd feel even worse."Ken looked at her quizzically. "Suppose your mother or father had said, You sound very worried about that test, Maria.' Would that have made a difference?""Oh, yes!" Maria exclaimed. "Because then I could have told them about the black X's and the shame of having to do it again and again in front of the whole class."Ken was still skeptical. "And that would be enough to make you feel less anxious and do better in math?"Maria paused. "I think so," she said slowly, "because if my parents had listened to my worries and let me talk about them, then I think I would have had more courage to go to school the next day and the ambition to try harder."A few days after this conversation took place, Maria returned, all smiles, and pulled out a small piece of folded paper from her purse. "I want you to hear some of the things my own children said to me this week. After I tell you, you must all guess what I didn't say to them. The first is from my daughter, Ana Ruth." Mafia unfolded her paper and read: "Mama, my gym teacher made me run laps because I didn't get dressed fast enough and everyone was looking at me."Ken answered immediately. "You didn't say, 'What did you expect your teacher to do? Applaud you? Give you a medal for being slow?'"Everyone at the table laughed. Mafia said, "Now here's my son, Marco: 'Ma, don't get mad. I lost my new gloves.'""This one is mine," Jane said. "'What?! That's the second pair of gloves you've lost this month. Do you think we're made of money? In the future, when you take your gloves off, put them in your pocket. And before you leave the bus, check the seat and the floor to make sure they haven't fallen out.'""Hold it. What's wrong with that?" Ken asked. "You're teaching him responsibility.""The timing is wrong," said Jane."Why's that?""Because when a person is drowning, it's not the time to give swimming lessons.""Hmmm," said Ken. "I'll have to think about that one....Okay, your turn, Liz," he announced, pointing to me. Maria looked down at her paper and said, "This is also from Ana Ruth: 'I don't know if I want to be in the orchestra anymore.'"I jumped right in. "'After all the money we've spent on your violin lessons, you're talking about quitting,t Your father is going to be very upset when he hears this.'"Maria looked at us in amazement. "How did all of you know what I almost said?""Easy," said Jane. "That's what our parents said to us and what I still catch myself saying to my own kids.""Maria," Ken said, "don't keep us in suspense. What did you say to your children?""Well," Maria answered proudly, "when Marco couldn't find his new gloves, I didn't lecture him. I said, 'It can be very upsetting to lose something....Do you think you could have left your gloves on the bus?' He stared at me as if he couldn't believe his ears and said tomorrow morning he'd ask the bus driver if he found them."And when Ana Ruth told me the gym teacher made her do laps in front of everybody, I said, 'That must have been embarrassing.' She said, 'Yes, it was,' and then changed the subject, which is not unusual for her, because she never tells me anything that's going on."But the big surprise is what happened later. After her music lesson she said, 'I don't know if I want to be in the orchestra anymore.' Her words took the breath out of me, but I said, 'So, a part of you wants to stay in the orchestra and a part of you doesn't.' She became very quiet. Then she started talking and it all came out. She told me she liked playing but that the rehearsals took up so much of her time, she never saw her friends anymore, and now they never even call her and maybe they aren't really her friends anymore. Then she began to cry and I held her.""Oh, Maria," I said, deeply touched by her experience."It's funny, isn't it?" Jane said. "Ana Ruth couldn't tell you what was really troubling her until you accepted her mixed-up feelings.""Yes," Maria agreed enthusiastically, "and once the real problem was out in the open, she got an idea for how to help herself. The next day she told me she decided to stay in the orchestra and maybe she could make some new friends there.""That's wonderful!" I said."Yes," Maria said with a slight frown, "but I only told you the good things I did. I didn't tell you what happened when Marco told me he hated Mr. Peterson.""Oooh...That's a tough one," I said. "Didn't you work in Mr. Peterson's class all last

year?"Maria looked pained. "A very fine teacher," she murmured. "Very dedicated.""That's what I mean," I said. "You were in a bind. On the one hand, you wanted to support your son. On the other hand, you think highly of Mr. Peterson and didn't want to be critical of him.""Not just Mr. Peterson," said Maria. "I'm probably old-fashioned, but I was brought up to believe that it's wrong to let a child talk against any teacher.""But supporting your son," exclaimed Jane, "doesn't mean you have to disapprove of Mr. Peterson." She quickly sketched in her version of a parent's typical reaction when a child complains about his teacher. Then we all worked together on creating a helpful dialogue. Our challenge was to avoid agreeing with the child or putting down the teacher. Here's what we came up with.The bell rang. Ken picked up his lunch tray and said, "I'm still not sure about all this stuff. Maybe it's okay for parents, but it seems to me it ought to be enough for a teacher to be a decent person who likes kids, knows his subject, and knows how to teach it.""Unfortunately," said Jane, walking out with him, "it isn't. If you want to be able to teach, then you need students who are emotionally ready to listen and learn."I tagged behind, feeling there was more to say but not sure what. Driving home in the car that afternoon, I replayed the many conversations of the week and felt a new conviction growing within.I wished I had thought to tell Ken:As teachers our goal is greater than just passing on facts and information.If we want our students to be caring human beings, then we need to respond to them in caring ways.If we value our children's dignity, then we need to model the methods that affirm their dignity.If we want to send out into the world young people who respect themselves and respect others, then we need to begin by respecting them. And we can't do that unless we show respect for what it is they feel.That's what I wished I had said.A Quick ReminderCHILDREN NEED TO HAVE THEIR FEELINGS ACKNOWLEDGEDAt Home and in SchoolChild: Just because of a few careless mistakes, I only got a seventy!Adult: Don't worry. You'll do better next time.rInstead of dismissing the child's feelings, you can:1. Identify the child's feelings."You sound very disappointed. It can be upsetting when you know the answer and lose points for careless mistakes."2. Acknowledge the child's feelings with a sound or word."Oh" or "Mmm" or "Uh" or "I see."3. Give the child in fantasy what you can't give him in reality."Wouldn't it be great if you had a magic pencil that would stop writing if you were about to make a mistake!"4. Accept the child's feelings even as you stop unacceptable behavior."You're still so angry about that grade, you're kicking your desk! I can't allow that. But you can tell me more about what's upsetting you. Or you can draw it."Questions and Stories from Parents and TeachersQuestions from Parents1. Sometimes my seven-year-old son, Billy, falls apart when he does his homework, ff he can't figure something out, he'll tear the paper out of his notebook, throw it on the floor, or break his pencils. What can I do about these outbursts?Billy needs a parent who will help him identify his feelings and teach him how to deal with them. He needs to hear, "It can be very frustrating when you can't find the answer! It makes you want to rip and throw and break things. Billy, when you feel like that, say, 'Dad, I'm frrrrrustrated!! Can you help me?' Then maybe we can figure something out together."2. For the past week, my thirteen-year-old daughter has been too upset to do homework or study for her midterms. It seems she had told her best friend in strictest confidence that she "liked" a certain boy and her friend lost no time in letting the boy know. After I commiserated with her over how betrayed she must have felt, I didn't know what to say next or how to advise her. What could I have told her to do?One of the problems with offering advice -- even solicited advice ("Mom, what should I do?") -- is that when children are in emotional turmoil, they can't hear you. They're in too much pain. Your hasty advice will seem either irrelevant ("What has that got to do with me?"), invasive ("Don't tell me what to do!"), demeaning ("Do you think I'm so stupid, I couldn't have figured that out for myself?."), or threatening ("That sounds good, but I could never do it").Before your daughter can even begin to think about solutions, there are many concerns she might want to share with you: "Should I confront my friend? How? Can she ever be trusted again? Should I try to keep the relationship? Should I say anything to the boy? If so, what?" These are all thoughtful questions that give her an opportunity to understand more about human relationships. By moving in with instant advice, you short-circuit an important learning experience.3. Is there never a time for advice?After a child has been "heard out," you can tentatively ask, "How would you feel about...?" "Do you think it would help if...?" "Does it make sense to...?" "What do you think would happen if...?" By giving a child the option to accept, reject, or explore your suggestions, you make it possible for her to hear your thoughts and consider them.4. Lately my son has been stomping around the house and griping about his social studies teacher: "He makes us read the newspaper every day and have debates every week and he's always giving tests. Nobody gives us as much work as Mr. M.!" I never know how to respond. It's getting to the point where I'm beginning to feel sorry for the kid.Your son doesn't need your pity. He does need your understanding and appreciation for what he's up against. Any of the following statements

might be helpful:"So Mr. M. really piles on the work.""I can hear how much you resent all the pressure.""I bet if you were the teacher, you'd declare a holiday every once in a while.""Sounds as if Mr. M. is a tough and demanding teacher. It must be quite a challenge to live up to his high standards."5. What can you do about a child who refuses to tell you what's bothering her?As adults we have all had experiences that we haven't felt like talking about with anyone -- for the moment or even forever. Some of us prefer to work through our hurt or pain or shame privately, by ourselves. Children are no different. They'll send clear signals when they want to be left alone to nurse their wounds. Even after hearing an empathic comment like "Something rotten must have happened today," they'll turn away or leave the room or tell you frankly, "I don't want to talk about it." All we can do is let them know that we' re there for them if they change their minds.Stories from ParentsThis first story was sent in by a mother who described how her husband helped their son deal with his "first-week-of-school" anxieties.It was the second day of school and I was trying very hard to get my kids onto an earlier bedtime schedule. Everyone was cooperating -- except Anthony, my nine-year-old. He kept whining and arguing with me and, no matter what I said, wouldn't get ready for bed. Finally I told my husband, "Joe, you'd better take over with 'your son' because I'm about to 'lose it!'" Here's what happened next:Joe: Hey, Tony, I want to talk to you. Mom says you're giving her a hard time. What's going on? Looks to me like something's eating you.Anthony: I've got a lot of worries!Joe: Well, I want to hear about them. All of them. Let's talk in your room.They go into Anthony's bedroom together. Joe comes out about twenty minutes later looking pleased with himself.Me: What happened?Joe: Nothing. I put the kid to bed.Me: How'd you manage that?Joe: I wrote down his worries.Me: That's it?Joe: And I read them back to him.Me: Then what happened?Joe: I told him I'd help him tackle his worries on the weekend and he put his list under the pillow, got into his pajamas, and went to bed.The next morning, when I was changing Anthony's bed, his list fell on the floor. Here's what it said:WHAT'S WORRYING ANTHONY1. Messy closet and room. Not enough space to spread out.2. Needs more clothes for school.3. Great deal of work at school with lots of books to carry. (Too soon to start so much work!)4. Needs more money for school snacks.5. Something wrong with bike. Chain keeps slipping.6. Lost quarter under washing machine. (Makes you feel even the little money you have is disappearing.)7. Thinks maybe all money problems can be solved by father giving a hundred-dollar check.I had to smile when I read it. You think only grownups have "real" worries. It's easy to forget that kids can have them, too. And just like us, they need someone to listen and take their worries seriously.This story describes how a mother helped her daughter get past her resistance to the college application process.Almost everyone in the senior class had sent in their college applications, except my daughter, Karen. She's always had a tendency to leave things till the last minute, but this was going too far. I tried not to nag, to drop a casual reminder whenever I saw an opening, but got nowhere. Then her father sat down with her and tried to get her started. He was very patient. He went over some of the things he thought the college would want to know about her and even helped her to write an outline. Karen promised to get it all done by the weekend, but didn't.As the days went by, I began to get hysterical and found myself yelling at her. I warned her that if she didn't send in her applications immediately, she'd never get into a decent college. Still no action.Then in a moment of inspiration -- that grew out of desperation -- I said, "Boy, filling out a college application can be pretty threatening. Having to answer all those questions and write an essay that might decide which college you'll end up in is a job anyone would want to put off as long as possible."She gave a loud "Yeah!!"I said, "Wouldn't it be great if they got rid of college applications altogether and every college hired admissions officers who had ESP and would automatically know how lucky they would be to have you? You'd be flooded with acceptances!"Karen broke into a big smile and went upstairs to bed. The next afternoon she actually started filling out her applications. By the end of the week, they were all in the mail!This next experience was shared by a mother who had to cope with her child's serious, long-term illness.When my son, TJ, was about eleven, he already had a pacemaker and special glasses to hold up his weak eyelids. Now he needed a hearing aid. As we drove home from TJ's audiology appointment, he announced, "You better not even get that stupid hearing aid. There's no way I'm wearing it to school. I'm just gonna throw it in the garbage. I'm gonna throw it in the toilet!"As I drove, my heart sinking, I knew enough to keep my mouth shut until I could think of something to say that wouldn't make things worse. My son looked over at me and said, "Did you hear what I said?"I replied (thank God), "I hear a boy who absolutely hates the idea of wearing a hearing aid -- who feels that it is about the worst thing he can imagine!"TJ sat quietly for a moment. Then he said, "Yeah...and if anybody at school makes fun of me, I'm never wearing it again!"I paused and ventured, "Perhaps you'd like to have the barber leave your hair a little longer on the sides."TJ said, "Yeah, let's tell him."The pounding in my chest subsided, and I said a

prayer of thanks for the skills I had learned.Questions from Teachers1. Is it my responsibility to deal with kids' feelings in the classroom? Isn't that the counselor's job? I barely have time to teach.Sometimes what seems like the "long way" turns out to be the short way. It may be better to spend a few minutes dealing with a student's strong feelings than letting them mushroom into a problem that consumes valuable class time. In the process you will also have helped a child in need.2. I get nowhere when I question my students about their feelings. They usually answer, "I don't know." Why is that?Children become uncomfortable when adults interrogate them about their feelings: "What did you feel?...How do you feel now?...Angry?...Scared?...Why do you feel that way?" Questions like these cause children to shut down rather than open up. Especially unsettling to a child is the question that demands the answer to why he feels what he feds. The word "why" requires him to justify his feelings, to come up with a logical, acceptable reason for having them. Often he doesn't know the reason. He doesn't have the psychological sophistication to say, "When the kids at the bus stop teased me, it was a blow to my serf-esteem."When a child is unhappy, what he most appreciates is a parent or teacher who will venture a guess as to what might be going on inside him. "It hurts to be teased. No matter what the reason, it can hurt a lot." That tells the child that if he needs to talk more, the adult will be emotionally available to him.3. You say children need to have their worst feelings accepted. Isn't there the danger that students will interpret our acceptance as permission to act out their worst feelings?Not if we make a clear distinction between feelings and behavior. Yes, students have the right to feel their anger and to express it. No, they don't have the right to behave in a way that harms another person, either physically or emotionally. We can tell David, for example, "You were so mad at Michael that you tried to punch him. David, I can't allow my students to hurt each other. Tell Michael what you feel with words, not fists."4. I have a junior high student who comes from a dysfunctional family. It's hard for me to be understanding when he tells me, "I hate you," or "You're mean," or uses words that I wouldn't even repeat. I never know how to respond. Any suggestions?Sometimes a troubled student will test his teacher by deliberately lashing out to make her angry or defensive. Part of the fun is to "pull the teacher's chain" and push her into a long angry harangue while the class smirks. Instead of reacting with hostility, you can quietly say, "I didn't like what I just heard. If you're angry, tell me in another way, and I'll be glad to listen."5. One of my students recently told me about some troubles she was having at home. It seems her brother and her parents were always fighting. I said, "I can see how unhappy you are about that, but look at all the things you have to be grateful for." She burst into tears. What did I do wrong?Beware the word but. It dismisses the emotion that was just expressed and signals: "Now I'm about to explain why your feelings are not important." Children need to hear an unqualified acceptance of their emotions of the moment. ("I can see how unhappy you are about what's happening at home. You wish everyone would get along better.") A response that conveys full understanding -- without reservation -- gives young people the courage to begin to deal with their problems.Stories from TeachersThis first story was from a student teacher who was assigned to a bilingual kindergarten class.Several weeks into the term a parent who had just moved into the neighborhood brought her little boy into the classroom, introduced him to the teacher, and quickly left. The teacher smiled pleasantly, showed him to his seat, handed him crayons and paper, and told him the class was drawing pictures of someone in their family. The little boy burst into tears. The teacher said, "No, no. No llores." ("Don't cry.") I moved closer to comfort him, and the teacher waved me away. "Leave him alone," she said sternly, "or he'll be crying 'til June." Then she went back to her desk to finish her report.I tried ignoring him, but his crying was too pitiful to bear. I sat down next to him and gently stroked his back. He put his head on his desk and sobbed, "Quiero mi mama....Quiero mama!" I whispered to him, "Quieres tu mama?" ("You want your mommy?") He stared at me through tear-filled eyes and said, "S."I said (in Spanish), "It's hard to leave your mother. And even though you know you'll see her soon, it's not easy to wait. Maybe we can make a picture of your mommy." Then I picked up a crayon, made a circle for a face, and drew a nose and a mouth. Then I handed him the crayon and said, "Here, you make the eyes."He stopped crying, clutched the crayon, and made two painstaking dots. I said, "You gave her eyes. What color will you make the hair?" He picked up a black crayon and went on to make hair. When I left him, he was still working on his picture.I felt wonderful. I guess I could have ignored him and he might have eventually settled down, but by acknowledging his unhappy feelings, I know I helped him to let go of them.This next scene was reported by a junior high school shop teacher. He told how he broke up a lunchroom fight by acknowledging the rage of each of the antagonists.I heard yelling and saw two boys on the floor. I ran over and yanked off Manuel, who was sitting on Julio and pounding his chest. Here's what went on as I pulled them apart:Me: Boy, you two are mad at each other!Manuel: He kicked me between the legs!Me: That hurts

like crazy! No wonder you're so angry.Julio: He punched me in the stomach.Me: So that's why you kicked him!Manuel: He took my potato chips.Me: Oh, so that's what made you mad. Well, I bet now that Julio knows you don't want anyone taking your chips, he won't do it again.Manuel: Better not.They stood there glowering at each other.Me: Maybe you two need some time apart, before you can be friends again.That was it. Later in the hall, I saw the boys walking together and laughing. When they saw me, Julio called out, "Look, we're friends again!"This final story came from a teacher who had to cope with students who were shaken by the outbreak of a war.The day after the Gulf War broke out, many of the children seemed frightened and nervous. I thought the best thing I could do for them was to try to put recent events into a historical perspective, so I prepared a lesson reviewing other major wars the United States had fought, starting with the Revolutionary War. When I announced my intentions, the students were silent. One girl said, "Mrs. Ritter, could we not do what you planned today? Could we talk about how we feel about war?"The class looked at me anxiously. I asked, "Is that what you'd like to do?" Heads nodded solemnly. I was touched that they trusted me enough to ask for an alternative to the planned lesson.One of the boys started. "War is dumb," he said gloomily.All eyes turned to me to see what my reaction would be. "I can hear how strongly you feel," I said. "Tell us more."That did it. The next thirty minutes sped by as the students took turns expressing their worst fears and deepest anxieties. Then someone said, "Let's write. Okay?" "Good," I thought. "Maybe it would help if somehow they could channel their intense feelings into creative expression."They opened their notebooks and wrote in somber silence. Toward the end of the period, I asked if anyone wanted to read his or her work aloud. Many of them did. Here are excerpts fi.om the writing of three of the children.Frightened and away from homethey fight and lose their lives forsomething that could have beenprevented.SilviaDuring war you hear many soundssounds of guns or cries for helpbut the sound that is loudest of allis the sound of the breaking heartsof families of the men who die at war.JosephMany innocent people will dieand many more start to cry.When the children's mommiesand daddies die,the children are sad,the children are scared,the children don't understand why.JamieBy the end of the period, the heavy cloud that had hung over the room seemed to lift. The children had shared their common pain. We all felt more connected to each other. A little less alone.