

# **How to Talk to Little Kids Will Listen: A Survival Guide to Life with Children Ages 2-7**

By Joanna King & Julie Faber

## **TOOLS FOR HANDLING EMOTIONS**

### **1. Acknowledge Feelings with Words**

“You were looking forward to that playdate. How disappointing!”

“It can be so frustrating when train tracks fall apart.”

### **2. Acknowledge Feelings with Writing**

“Oh no!” We don’t have the ingredients we need! Let’s make a shopping list.”

“You really want that underwater Lego set.” Let’s write that down on your wish list.”

### **3. Acknowledge Feeling with Art**

“You seem so sad.” (Draw a stick figure with big tears or simply hand over a crayon or pencil.)

“You are this angry!” Make angry lines or rip and crumple paper.)

### **4. Give in Fantasy What You Cannot Give in Reality**

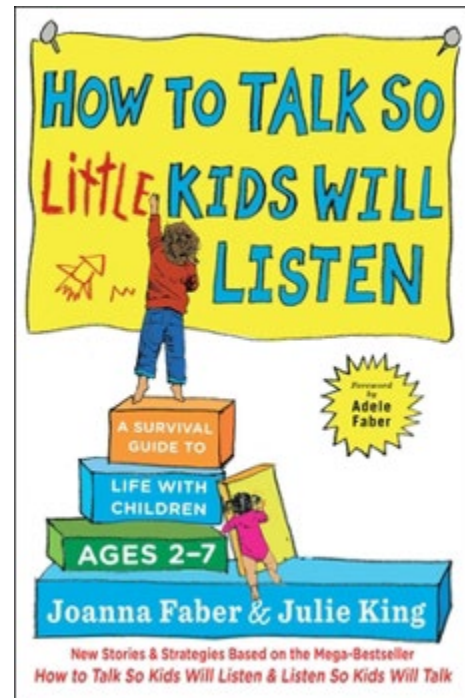
“I wish we had a million billion more hours to play.”

### **5. Acknowledge Feelings with (Almost) Silent Attention**

“Ugh!” “Mmm.” “Ooh.” “Huh.”

## **IMPORTANT POINTS**

- All feelings can be accepted. Some actions must be limited.
- Substitute “but” with “the problem is” or “Even though you know.”
- Match the emotion. Be dramatic!
- Resist the urge to ask questions of a distressed child.



## TOOLS FOR ENGAGING COOPERATION

### **1. Be Playful.**

*Make it a game.*

“Can we get all the cars in the box before the timer beeps? Ready...set...go!”

*Make inanimate objects talk.*

“I am an empty sock. I need a foot in me!”

*Use a different accent or a silly voice.*

“I...am...your...robot...Must...buckle...seat...belt...now.”

*Pretend*

“We need to climb this slippery mountain into the car seat.”

*Play the incompetent fool.*

“Oh dear, where does this sleeve go? Over your head? No? On the arm? This is so confusing! Thank you for helping me!”

### **2. Offer a Choice**

“Do you want to hop to the tub like a bunny or crawl to the tub like a crab?”

### **3. Put the Child in Charge**

“Johnny, would you like to set the timer and let us know when it’s time to leave?”

### **4. Give Information**

“Tissues go in the trash.”

### **5. Say it with a Word (or a Gesture)**

“Trash!”

### **6. Describe What You See**

“I see most of the blocks put away in the toy box. There are only a few blocks left to go.”



## 7. Describe How You Feel

“I don’t like food thrown on the floor.”

## 8. Write a Note

“Put me on your head before riding. Love, your bike helmet.”

## 9. Take Action Without Insult

“I’m putting the paint away for now. I can’t let you splatter the other kids.”

## IMPORTANT POINTS

- Don’t turn a choice into a threat. Make sure both options are acceptable to you and your child.
- Appreciate progress before describing what’s left to do.
- When expressing anger or frustration, use the word *I*, avoid the word *you*.
- Express strong anger sparingly. It can feel like an attack.

## TOOLS FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

### 1. Express Your Feelings ... Strongly!

“HEY, I don’t like people being pushed!”

### 2. Show Your Child How to Make Amends

“Your sister got scared on the top of the slide. Let’s do something to make her feel better. Do you want to offer her some pretzels? Do you think she’d like to play with your sand bucket?”

### 3. Offer a Choice

“Were going to give the slide a rest for now. I can see you’re in no mood to wait for a turn. You can swing on the swings, or you can play in the sandbox. You decide.”



#### **4. Take Action Without Insult**

“We’re heading home. We’ll try the playground another day. I’m too worried about children getting hurt right now.”

#### **5. Try Problem-Solving**

##### **Step 1: Acknowledge your Child’s Feelings**

“I can see that you don’t like your hand held in the parking lot. It makes your fingers feel squeezed.”

##### **Step 2: Describe the Problem**

“The problem is, I worry about cars hitting children in the parking lot.”

##### **Step 3: Ask for Ideas**

“We need some ideas so we can go back to the park and have a good time without people getting mad or scared. What can we do?”

##### **Step 4: Decide Which Ideas you both like**

“So, you like the idea of holding onto my sleeve and leading me to the playground. Let’s circle that one.”

##### **Step 5: Try Out Your Solutions**

“Here we are at the parking lot. Grab my sleeve and show me which way to go!”

#### **IMPORTANT POINTS**

- If nothing is working, you may have to reconsider your basic expectations.
- Show respect for the conflict. Don’t minimize the problem.
- Remove the disputed object temporarily.
- You don’t have to wait for a problem to occur in order to use problem-solving. When possible, plan ahead!

## **TOOLS FOR PRAISE AND APPRECIATION**

### **1. Describe What You See**

“I see green lines that are zooming up and down the page. And look how they connect all these red shapes!”

### **2. Describe the Effect on Others**

“The baby loves it when you make those funny sounds. I see a big smile on her face.”

### **3. Describe Effort**

“You kept working on that button until you got it into that little buttonhole.”

### **4. Describe Progress**

“You sounded out each of the letters and you put them together. You read a whole sentence!”

## **OTHER TOOLS/TOPICS**

- Food: The Empty Plate.
- “Shy” Kids: “S/he will join you when s/he’s ready.”
- Sleep: “Back in A Minute”