Listening Without Pressuring a Child to Talk

A practical way to respond when you do not know what to say.

Make room for expression

Children differ in how they communicate. Some talk immediately; others draw, move, ask to be alone or need time. Do not interpret a child’s silence as refusal or evidence that nothing is wrong. Offer an invitation, not an interrogation.

Reflect the need

Short, specific responses can help: “I hear you want me nearby” or “You want some quiet right now.” Avoid automatic reassurance such as “Nothing bad can happen” or “You have no reason to worry.” Those statements may contradict the child’s experience.

Offer real options

Try one choice at a time: “Would talking or drawing feel easier?” “Would you like me to listen or help you solve something?” Avoid so many options that choosing becomes another burden.

Protect privacy

Do not collect sensitive trauma stories in an online form or ask children to upload drawings about traumatic experiences. Keep worksheets in a private place if they include feelings or personal details, and share with professionals only in appropriate ways.

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A PHRASE YOU CAN USE

“I am here. You can talk, draw, or say nothing for now.”

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

If a child reveals abuse or an immediate safety concern, follow safeguarding and emergency procedures rather than relying on worksheet routines.

REFERENCES & SCOPE

EMDRIA Children’s Toolkit and child mental health practice guidance. This guide is informational; a licensed professional provides individualized assessment and treatment.

PUT THIS INTO PRACTICE

One question I would like to ask a professional:

One choice I can offer my child without pressure:

What would tell me that more support is needed?

Bring these notes to an appropriate conversation if useful. Do not record sensitive traumatic memories here.