

LISTEN to CHILDREN (LTC) PROGRAM
A Mentoring Program of the Mental Health Association of Southeast Florida
TEACHER INFORMATION

Research shows that consequences of low self-esteem can include stress, anxiety, and increased likelihood for depression, problems with friendships, impaired academic performance, and underachievement with increased vulnerability to drug and alcohol abuse (University of Texas at Austin, 1999). The goal of the Listener Program is to enhance self-esteem, communication, decision-making and problem-solving skills in order to help prevent these negative outcomes. Listeners provide consistent, positive, one-on-one attention and support and become non-judgmental adult friends to children. They are trained to listen with the heart and try to understand the children's feelings. Their role is *not* to tutor students in academic areas (unless the CHILDREN *ask* for help.)

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES for TEACHERS

1. The relationship between the child and the Listener is **confidential**. Volunteers are trained to report suspicions of abuse, neglect, or other dangerous situations to the School Counselor. Please do not ask your student what s/he discussed during the meeting with the Listener.
2. Please limit interaction between the Listener and you to cordial greetings. If you want the Listener to have information, ask the School Counselor to share it. Although your intentions are good, it's best not to talk with the Listener about the child. The Listener-child relationship is unique in that the Listener is not an authority figure. If the two of you 'discuss' the child's behavior or other issues, it changes the dynamic of that relationship because the Listener is seen as just another authority figure.
3. Even if the child's behavior has been disruptive and upsetting to you, **please refrain from making negative comments when the Listener picks up or drops off the child**. This type of comment creates a very uncomfortable environment for the Listener (who is trying to enhance self-esteem) and the child. Unfortunately, according to feedback I receive from Listeners, this is very common. Please exercise self-control so that the child and volunteer can have a positive experience. Thanks to most of you who already follow these guidelines.
4. Time with the Listener is not to be used as a reward or punishment. Please do not threaten to take away the Listener time as a consequence for negative behavior or for not finishing schoolwork.
5. Remember to look for and encourage the positive so that children can build on their strengths.

Children who benefit from LTC include those with: low self-esteem, shyness, poor communication and/or social skills, or sadness/flat affect. Children adjusting to a life change or challenge (moving to new school, illness/death of loved one, divorce/remarriage, new baby, sibling with special needs) also benefit. **Please do not refer students with serious behavioral problems as Listeners are not professionals.**

Thank you for caring about your students' emotional well-being and understanding that it is necessary for academic success. For some children, having a Listener is one of the few bright spots of their week!

If you have any questions, contact LTC@mhasefl.org or call 754-216-2070.