

Validating Sparks



grades: 3-4



45 minutes

“Part of being successful is about asking questions and listening to the answers.”
– Anne Burrell

Lesson Summary

Students consider the many emotions they experience each day. They discuss how everyone has emotions, how people's experiences vary, and how they can validate someone else's feelings by listening to them. Students then practice active listening with one another, preparing to take action by listening attentively to someone in their lives.

Students will Examine

- How everyone experiences a wide range of emotions.
- How some emotions feel positive while others may feel uncomfortable.
- How can they be active listeners and support others' emotions?

Pre-Activity Prep

- (Optional) Send home the ThinkGive@Home: Halfway There! ([PDF](#)) (1/student).
- Print and cut the Spark Template ([PDF](#)) (1/student) (SHARE section).
- Print the Worksheet: My Feelings ([PDF](#)) (1/student) (THINK.GIVE section).
- Print the Worksheet: Feeling + Emotion Words ([PDF](#)) (1/student) (THINK.GIVE section).
- Print and cut the Worksheet: How to be an Active Listener ([PDF](#)) (1/student) (REFLECT section).



MATERIALS

ThinkGive Journals
Spark Template ([PDF](#))
Quote Image ([PDF](#))
Worksheet: My Feelings ([PDF](#))
Worksheet: Feeling + Emotion Words ([PDF](#))
Worksheet: How to be an Active Listener ([PDF](#))



MEDIA TO PREP

Slides: [Validating Sparks](#)
Read-aloud book: [The Rabbit Listened](#) (3:37)
(Digging Deeper) Video: [Empathetic Listening](#) (1:45)
(Digging Deeper) Read-aloud book: [I'm Sad](#) (2:35)

SHARE

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Spark Template

Each student writes the action(s) they took since the last ThinkGive lesson to care for someone in their support network on a Spark Template ([PDF](#)).

Encourage neat handwriting and outlining in marker. When ready, they can display their actions on the Spark Bulletin Board.

Small Group Share

Students form small groups and share the action(s) they took to care for someone in their support network and how taking their action(s) made them feel.

OPEN

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Quote/Image

Display the Quote Image ([PDF](#)) and/or read the quote or invite a volunteer to read it (see slides): “Part of being successful is about asking questions and listening to the answers.” – Anne Burrell

Ask: What does this image/quote mean to you?

THINK • GIVE

Suggested time: 15 minutes

So Many Feelings

Ask: What are “feelings” or “emotions”? Can you name some feelings you know?

Hand out the Worksheets: My Feelings ([PDF](#)) (1/student) and Feeling + Emotion Words ([PDF](#)) (1/student).

Explain: We all experience a wide range of emotions, and they’re all okay! There is no such thing as a “wrong” feeling. Sometimes, we don’t pay much attention to how we feel in the moment. Let’s take a moment to think about how we felt at different times yesterday. For example, how did you feel when you woke up? Write that emotion in a light purple rectangle and draw an emoji to represent how it felt in the circle above. Next, think about how you felt later in the morning. Write that emotion in a new rectangle and illustrate it with another emoji. Continue reflecting on other emotions you felt throughout the day and add them to your worksheet.

As students finish, ask: What other emotions have you experienced? Add these to your worksheet.



VOCAB

Emotion: noun; a reaction in our mind or body to something happening around us, often influencing our thoughts or actions.

Feeling: noun; the physical sensations we experience in our body because of an emotion.



CONNECTION

Read-aloud book: [Pass It On](#) (2:58) by Sophy Henn. This story inspires readers to spread kindness by sharing positive experiences and emotions.

Discuss: What positive emotions have you experienced recently? How can sharing a smile or a laugh make a difference in someone’s day?

Optional Share: In pairs, small groups, or as a class/group, students choose one emotion to act out while others guess what it is.

Discuss:

- What emotions feel good?
- What emotions feel uncomfortable?
- Do we all feel the same emotions when doing similar things? Why might people react differently in the same situation?

DIGGING DEEPER

Watch: I'm Sad (2:35), a read-aloud book by Michael Ian Black. In this story, characters learn that sadness is a normal emotion, that it can feel good to allow ourselves to feel sad, and that everyone has their way of coping and feeling better.

Discuss:

- Why is it important to allow ourselves to feel sad sometimes?
- Can you think of a time when you felt sad and something else, like happy or frustrated? How did you handle it?
- How can we manage feeling multiple emotions at once? What might that look like?

REFLECT

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Active Listening

Watch: The Rabbit Listened (3:37), a read-aloud book by Cori Doerrfeld. In this story, Taylor's block tower gets destroyed. Different animals try to help in various ways, but Taylor only feels better when the rabbit sits quietly and listens.

Discuss:

- How did each animal try to help Taylor?
- If you were Taylor, which animal's helping method would have worked best for you? Why?
- Why was the rabbit's quiet listening the most effective? What does this teach us about the power of simply being there for someone?

Explain: One way to show care for others is by being an active listener, just like the rabbit was for Taylor. Active listening involves giving your full attention to the person speaking and using your body language to show you're engaged. Active listeners validate the speaker's feelings by saying things like, "Tell me more," "That sounds difficult," "Thank you for sharing," or "I'm listening." This approach helps the speaker feel understood and supported.



VOCAB

Active listening: noun; focusing on and understanding what someone is saying, showing them you're genuinely listening.

Validate: verb; acknowledging and respecting another person's feelings, showing their emotions are important.

Empathetic listening: noun; a listening style that goes beyond hearing words, focusing on understanding the speaker's feelings, perspective, and emotions.

Students form pairs (either self-selected or assigned) and practice active listening. Student A asks Student B a prompting question and then practices the corresponding active listening skill. Afterward, they switch roles. Student B asks Student A the same question and listens to their response. When ready, Student A moves on to the next question.

Prompting Questions + Active Listening Skills:

Question: Share a time you felt excited.

Active listening skill: Lean forward and make eye contact with your partner.

Question: Share a time you were surprised.

Active listening skill: Focus on your partner's words; try not to think about anything else.

Question: Describe your favorite food and why you love it.

Active listening skill: Wait until your partner finishes speaking before responding.

Question: Describe a time when you did something challenging.

Active listening skill: Show interest with phrases like, "Tell me more" or "How did that make you feel?"

Question: Share a time you felt nervous.

Active listening skill: Validate your partner's feelings with statements like, "It sounds like that was hard" or "You must have felt frustrated."

Discuss:

- How did your partner make you feel listened to?
- How did you feel when you were listened to?
- Was active listening easy or challenging? Explain why.
- Who outside of school could benefit from your active listening skills?

Hand out the Worksheet: How to be an Active Listener ([PDF](#)) (1/student). Students glue them into their ThinkGive Journals for future reference.

DIGGING DEEPER

Watch: [Empathetic Listening](#) (1:45). This clip from Inside Out shows how empathetic listening—focusing on understanding the speaker's emotions—can be more helpful than trying to "cheer them up," especially when someone is feeling sad.

Discuss:

- Which character's response to Bing Bong felt more helpful? Why?
- How did Sadness help Bing Bong by listening to him? What did she say or do that made a difference?



TEACHER TIP

Students can write the definition of an active listener in their ThinkGive Journals.

CONNECT + CLOSE

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Take Action

Explain: Between now and our next ThinkGive session on [give date], practice being an active listener. Pay attention to how your listening affects the other person and how it makes you feel.

Things to Consider

- The ThinkGive focus is on being True. Engage authentically with someone and show an interest in what they say.
- Pay attention to your feelings to ensure you're truly present and listening.
- Being an active listener, even with a close friend, can help you discover new things.

Brainstorm Actions

Here are some action ideas to inspire students. Brainstorm more together if needed to build confidence in taking true, small, and brave actions.

- When my mom got home from work, I asked her about her day and listened carefully without interrupting.
- My classmate seemed upset, so I sat beside him and told him I could listen if he wanted to talk.
- I was working on a puzzle when my stepsister asked if we could talk. I put the puzzle down and listened as she shared how nervous she was about joining her new basketball team.

Closing Quote/Image

Use this Quote and Image ([PDF](#)) to close the lesson.

"Part of being successful is about asking questions and listening to the answers." – Anne Burrell

Discuss:

- What does this quote/image mean to you now?
- How does this quote/image connect to the lesson?

★ THINKGIVE THREE

1. True: be authentic
2. Small: small is all
3. Brave: step into your courage zone

★ CONNECTION

Anne Burrell (1969–Present) is an American chef and TV personality known for hosting *Secrets of a Restaurant Chef* and co-hosting *Worst Cooks in America*. In 2015, she won the *Chopped All-Stars* Tournament and donated her \$75,000 prize to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Student Journal Questions

- 💬 Why is it important to ask questions and listen to the answers?
- 💬 How does it feel when someone listens to you without interrupting?
- 💬 How can being a good listener help in school and with your friends?

Extensions

DO

Listening Skits

Students work in pairs or small groups to create and perform skits that show active listening in various scenarios.

Discuss:

- What actions or words did the characters use to show they were listening carefully?
- What did you learn about listening from watching your others' skits?

Guess the Emotion

This activity helps students practice recognizing and expressing emotions. Write different emotions on slips of paper and place them in a basket. Pass the basket around; each student draws a slip. Students act out the emotion using only facial expressions and gestures. The rest of the group guesses the emotion.

WATCH

Video: [Active listening is a Skill!](#) (2:15). This video explains the four key steps of active listening: Stop, Breathe, Listen, and Respond.

Discuss:

- What message does a speaker receive when we aren't fully listening?
- How can our body language demonstrate that we are actively listening?

Video: [PBS KIDS Talk About | FEELINGS & EMOTIONS!](#) (9:40). Children and their grown-ups discuss their feelings and how they handle them.

Discuss:

- What big emotions have you experienced, and how do you cope when they arise?
- Who do you talk to about your feelings?
- When is it most challenging to share your feelings? What would make it easier?

READ/LISTEN

Read-aloud book: [Listen](#) (4:30) by Gabi Snyder. This story explores the difference between hearing and truly listening and the importance of paying attention to the world around us.

Discuss:

- What sounds do you hear daily, and how do they make you feel?
- What does it mean to "listen past the noise?"
- What is the difference between hearing and listening?

Read-aloud book: [The Way I Feel](#) (4:03) by Jana Cain. This rhyming book explores a range of emotions, highlighting that all feelings are normal and temporary.

Discuss:

- Which emotions from the book have you felt before?
- Why do you think people feel so many different emotions? How do feelings help us understand ourselves and others?