



Using The Four Children as a Model for Active Listening

Topic

Passover: The Four Children

Grade Level(s)

This activity is designed for families with students in 4th-6th grades. It can also be done only with students (substitute another student anywhere “parent” role is listed).

This activity is Shabbat friendly.

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will

- Learn about the Four Children in the Passover Haggadah
- Learn about and experience Active Listening
- Consider the benefits of Active Listening in intergenerational contexts

Materials needed

- Four Children Text Study, one per participant
- Active Listening Guide, one per participant
- Timekeeping device (for example, watch with a second hand)

Prepare in Advance

Download and print:

- Four Children Text Study, one per participant
- Active Listening Guide, one per participant

Background for Teachers

The midrash of the four children has become one of the centerpieces of the Pesach Seder. The midrash posits questions from four different types of children — חכם (hacham, wise), רשע (rasha, wicked), תם (tam, simple), and שׂאִינוּ יוֹדְעֵי לִשְׁאֹל (she'eino yodeia lishol, one who does not know how to ask) — and recommends the appropriate way to answer each one. Haggadot throughout the ages have represented these children with a wide variety of pictures, often demonstrating contemporary opinions of what each child represented. More generally, the four children can be seen as archetypes for the different personalities that children have the potential to demonstrate when they ask questions. They also can be understood as different parts of each individual person with each person having within themselves the ability to demonstrate wisdom, wickedness, simplicity, and an inability to know what to ask at a particular moment.

In this activity, designed for parents and children to engage in together, the Four Children are used as a window into how parents and children communicate and might communicate better. Basic concepts of Active Listening are introduced and practiced to offer parents and children tools for better communication and understanding.



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Description of Activities

- Ask participants what they remember about the Four Children.
- Read, or have volunteer/s read, the description of the Four Children from the Four Children Text Study sheet.
- Explain:
 - The Four Children are often explained in the simplest of terms, using only one dominant character trait per child.
 - All children, and all people, could be described using a more complex series of traits.
 - When parents and children talk, it is important for them to consider the whole person and the reasons behind behaviors.
 - Today we will consider the ways in which each child and parent interact and think about how they communicate.
- Invite parents and children to move closer together if they are not already sitting near one another.
- Assign each parent-child pair one of the following three children: wise, wicked, or simple. Multiple pairs can be assigned the same child to focus on.
- Distribute to each pair a copy of The Four Children Text Study.
- The pairs will review the text again and answer the Guiding Questions provided on the bottom of the text study with a focus on the child that they were assigned: wise, wicked, or simple.
- After the text study is complete, ask one representative from each group to offer their responses to the Guiding Questions, with a focus on question 3: What the next moments of conversation between child and parent might sound like.
- Ask:
 - What do you think about the way in which the parents and children interacted in these scenarios?
 - Do you think in these conversations that each child and parent might have felt heard and listened to?
- Guide participants toward the understanding that when we are in communication—especially between parent and child, and especially when we are speaking about something that is personal or emotional for us—it can be difficult to listen and to feel heard.
- Explain:
 - The Hagaddah was written centuries ago but still reflects many themes that we experience today, among them tension between children and parents, which is seen in the narrative of the Four Children.
 - Today we will learn one technique called Active Listening that hopefully will help you as parents and children listen to and understand each other better.
 - When you are practicing Active Listening, you listen to the other person without judgment or response, just focusing on what they are saying without trying to offer solutions.



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- Distribute copies of the Active Listening Guide, one per participant, and review it with the group.
- Ask for a volunteer pair, one child and one parent, to illustrate Active Listening. They do not need to be a related parent and child.
- The volunteer pair will sit at the front of the room.
- Offer the following scenario and ask the volunteer pair to practice Active Listening:
 - The parent recently purchased advance tickets to see a movie with the child.
 - The child was just invited to their best friend's birthday party, which happens to be at the same time as the movie.
 - The movie will be showing for weeks, but the party is only today.
- Before beginning, ask the child to consider: In this scenario, what are you feeling? What are you worried about? What is your goal?
- The child will speak to the parent for 60-90 seconds and the parent will actively listen, following the Active Listening Tips.
- The parent will respond to the child for 30-45 seconds, not offering judgment or solutions.
- Ask the parent to reflect: How did it feel when you were actively listening?
- Ask the child to reflect: How did it feel when the parent was actively listening to you?
- Ask for another volunteer pair.
- This time, provide the adult the following scenario to present to the child:
 - The child has been staying up late, and therefore waking up late, making mornings stressful and the parent sometimes late for work.
 - The parent has been responding previously by yelling or nagging, and it's getting to be really tense in the mornings.
- The parent speaks for 60-90 seconds and the child will actively listen.
- The child will respond to the parent for 30-45 seconds, not offering judgment or solutions.
- Ask the child to reflect: How did it feel when you were actively listening?
- Ask the parent to reflect: How did it feel when the child was actively listening to you?
- Ask the group:
 - What did you observe during the conversations?
 - How did observing these conversations make you feel?
 - Are there any questions, comments or concerns about Active Listening?
- Explain:
 - In a moment, I will ask parents and their children to find a quiet spot somewhere to sit together and practice Active Listening.
 - This is a good time to bring up a real topic that is on your mind but since we have limited time, possibly not the *most* pressing or lengthy issue you need to discuss.
 - The first person in the pair will have up to 3 minutes to speak. The respondent will have 1 minute. Then the first speaker will have an additional minute to reflect.
 - The speaker and listener will then switch.
- Give participants some time to settle and to silently consider what they would like to discuss.



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- Indicate when it is time to start, and also when it is time to move on to the next step throughout the activity.
- After both parent and child have each had time to speak and listen, bring together the group.
- Ask:
 - What did you learn from this activity?
 - If the four children—and their parents—of the Haggadah had been taught Active Listening, how do you think the conversation might have gone?
- If there is time, ask for a volunteer pair (it can be two kids, two adults, or a mix of kids and adults) to practice Active Listening with the wise or wicked child.
- Suggest that this might be a good activity to bring to the Passover Seder. Families can teach active listening and then guests can pair up and practice acting out the parent and child pairs for the wise, wicked or simple children of the Haggadah.
- Additionally, encourage parents to put a copy of the Active Listening Guide on their refrigerator or another prominent place in their home as a tool to refer to generally.