



Shaping the future, cultivating connection

2026 APS College of Educational and Developmental Psychologists Conference

Listening for connection: A relationship-oriented approach to child therapy

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My why and my core message



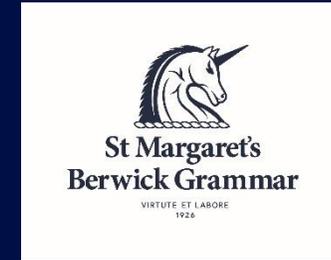
Our deepest need: to be seen, heard, and accepted

Children share again and again: “I feel lonely”

Listening for connection supports wellbeing



Four key components



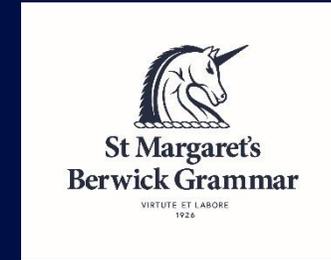
The Therapist – inner work

The Child – therapeutic connection

The Family – involving parents and carers

The World – linking to school, community, wider context

NOVA: a practical listening checklist



N – Nonverbal engagement (be warm and lean forward)

O – Openness & empathy (be willing to enter the child's world)

V – Verbal strategies (ask the child good questions)

A – Attentiveness (focus on the child and their feelings)

Why listening matters: key research



- **Norcross, J. C., & Lambert, M. J. (2018). Psychotherapy relationships that work III. *Psychotherapy*, 55, 303–315.**
- **Fredrickson, B. L. (2013). *Love 2.0: Creating happiness and health in moments of connection*. Penguin Group.**
- **Weinstein, N., Itzchakov, G., & Legate, N. (2021). The motivational value of listening during intimate and difficult conversations. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 16(2), Article e12639.**
- **Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.**

The Therapist: inner work



Make time to pause and reflect

Take care of yourself

Skovholt, T. M., & Trotter-Mathison, M. (2025). The resilient practitioner: Burnout and compassion fatigue prevention and self-care strategies for the helping professions (4th ed.). Routledge.

Competency 3.7: Monitors and manages self-care to sustain professional functioning and wellbeing

The Child: therapeutic connection



Ask good questions

Repair any ruptures



The Family: involving parents and carers

Expand your focus to include each child's family

Encourage messages of love



The World: linking to school, community, wider context



Collaborate with teachers

Ask teachers: “Tell me about the child. What do they find most challenging at school? How do they relate to their peers? How do they relate to you?”



Takeaways



The Therapist: Protect your capacity to listen by making time to pause and reflect and by taking care of yourself

The Child: Ask good questions and repair any ruptures

The Family: Meet with families early and encourage messages of love

The World: Meet with teachers early and collaborate with them



Thank you for listening

