

Parenting Pointers

Parenting Tips on: Communicating With Children

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When it comes to communicating with children, parents sometimes feel like they are speaking a different language! However, communication skills are essential to a positive parent/child relationship. Communication serves as a bridge between the child's world and the adult's world and parents who invest in learning positive communication skills understand their children better and are more successful in guiding their children as they grow up. Parents and children who learn and use positive communication skills are less likely to experience the negative consequences of manipulation, violence, bullying, aggressive behavior, whining, and withdrawal. Positive communication skills will carry over into one's relationships, work, school and social/emotional development.

Some parental tips for effective communication include:

- Showing respect in conversations with your child by listening and remembering what your child tells you, and not interrupting your child's sentences or thoughts.
- Taking advantage of the best times to talk with your child (i.e.: while driving, eating meals, walking, playing or at bedtime).
- Initiating positive reinforcement with support and encouragement. (i.e.: "You did a great job of explaining what happened at school today. That really helps me understand it better. Thanks for sharing that with me.")
- Communicating the truth to your child, in age-appropriate ways.
- Asking your child open-ended questions that require a response other than "yes" or "no".
- Acknowledging your child's feelings and emotions, and trying to see things from your child's perspective. (i.e.: "I can see that you are feeling really sad.") Avoid unnecessary teasing which may damage your child's feelings.
- Apologizing openly to your child when you make a mistake.
- Praising your child for his/her accomplishments and telling them that you love them and are proud of them.
- Playing with your child and opening up opportunities for conversation.

Effective communication is fostered when parents are open and honest with their children and when expectations are clearly stated. When stating an expectation, a good practice is to have your child repeat the expectation, or state it themselves. For example, "We are visiting the museum today. What are some of our rules in the museum?" For an older child, expectations may be determined together. For example, "What time do you think is reasonable for you to be home from the dance tonight?" Parents are often pleasantly surprised that open communication results in fewer arguments and more positive outcomes. Asking questions is more effective than stating demands and teaches your child important communication skills.

Often we forget that the most important aspect of communication is "listening". By asking questions and listening, parents can help children become more confident,

improve conversation skills, and develop independent decision-making skills. Like many parenting skills, communicating with a child requires patience and understanding. But with practice, effective communication becomes second nature, and children will carry those valuable skills into school, work and adult relationships.

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