

Practical Tips for Parent-Child Communication

What do you remember your parents saying to you?

Intention

Start each conversation with your child with your purpose in mind. Ask your child what they may want or need from you in the conversation; advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings, or help solving a problem.

****The key is to talk with your children — don't lecture, criticize, threaten or say hurtful things.**

Be available for your children

If you want good communication with your child pick the right times to talk and be available when they want to share. Communicate your desire to speak with them if you cannot do so immediately. Don't miss these chances.

Power of words

There is nothing more powerful than your parent's words! While you may never think to call your child names, your very tone and body language can communicate that they are a nuisance, annoying, unimportant, or dumb. Use your words to encourage your child.

Let your kids know you're listening

Take a moment to stop what you are doing, look at your child, and tell them you are listening. Show interest, ask questions, listen to their point of view, and don't interrupt them.

A great way to let them know you're listening is to repeat, or paraphrase, what you heard them say to ensure that you understand them correctly. Asking clarifying questions helps show your interest, as well.

Patterns of communication

You can change patterns of communication by talking about it with your child and working together as a team to beat those old hurtful patterns.

Teach your child how to communicate

Kids learn by imitating. Most often, they will follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems, and work through difficult feelings. It is important to:

- Look at the speaker
- Give your full attention
- Paraphrase and repeat what they said
- Ask clarifying, open questions
- Show empathy for feelings
- Respect their opinions
- Express your opinions gently
- Keep calm and listen on!

Respond in a way your children will hear

- Stop and notice your emotions. Are you angry or defensive? - Soften strong reactions! It is very difficult for kids to absorb information or consider their behavior when they are being shouted at or lectured, especially if they themselves are already feeling upset or stressed. You as the adult can control the environment to make communication more effective.
- Express your opinion without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it's okay to disagree. "I know you disagree with me, but this is what I think..."

****** As the adult, it's your job to focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during your conversation. Sometimes it is also your job to enforce your choice even if they disagree.

- Avoid *telling* kids how they feel. Instead of, "I can't believe you aren't nervous about that test!" try, "You say you aren't nervous about your test, but I noticed you're very fidgety while you're trying to sit down and study."

Be aware of their developmental abilities

- Be sure to give young children words to describe their feelings and thoughts. You can practice this easily by pointing out and discussing the feelings of characters in books or movies they love.
- Remember adolescents are not adults! They haven't fully developed the ability to think in abstract ways, so you cannot always speak to them as you would an adult. Some lines of reasoning and logic do not come naturally to them, and they may make the same mistakes repeatedly.

Encourage problem solving

It feels good when children ask us questions or for advice, but don't always rush to give them answers. "That's an interesting question. What do you think?" Leaving room for them to puzzle out their solutions will help them think more critically, and it gives them a chance to share their ideas – an important ingredient for good conversation!

Respect their struggles

Kids learn from their own choices. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't feel you always have to step in. Allowing them to work through problems encourages autonomy and reduces their dependence on you.

Parenting is hard work!!!

Listening and talking is the key to a healthy connection between you and your children. Parenting is hard work and maintaining a good connection with children can be challenging, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures, but don't give up!

What words do you hope your child remembers you saying?