

Family Communication

Communication is the way you let other people know about your ideas and feelings.

It is much more than the words you say. It is what you say, how you say it, why you say it, when you say it, and what you don't say. It is your facial expression, your gestures, your posture, and your tone of voice.

Good communication isn't something that just happens between members of strong families; they make it happen.

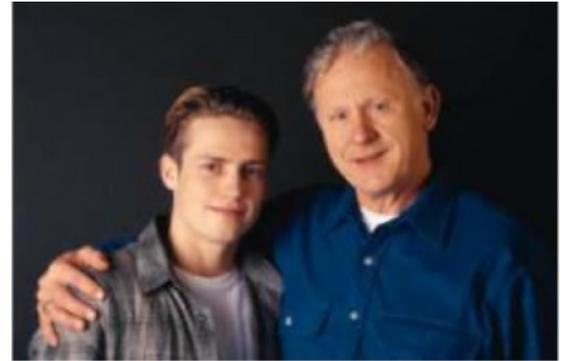
Good family communication involves being both an active listener and a thoughtful speaker. In this way children can learn how to communicate well and how to have more control of their lives.

Listening is more than hearing the sound of a voice. We are actively listening when we...

- stop what we're doing or thinking and keep our thoughts from drifting back to our concerns.
- focus on the words AND emotions expressed.
- avoid passing judgment on what has been said or on the person who is speaking.
- wait until the speaker has finished to think about what we're going to say.
- encourage the speaker to continue by looking directly at the speaker, nodding our head, or saying "I see." Avoid facial expressions or body poses that show disagreement or disgust.

Listening encourages children and teens to tell us what is happening in their lives.

By being good listeners, we discover what they are experiencing and the problems with which they may need help. Often these are different from our own experiences.



Listening =

When we don't listen carefully — or when we quickly pass judgment on what is said, we discourage others from sharing what their world is really like.

We can provide the guidance and advice children and teens really want if we encourage open communication by being good listeners.

Listening encourages children and teens to express their feelings.

As teens adjust to the changes in their bodies and in their social world, they need help dealing with new emotions and experiences. They will seek help from someone — often from other teens who may provide poor advice and information. They will seek help from us if we have shown that we listen with an open mind.

Listening builds self-esteem.

Taking the time to listen, and making the effort to understand, tells children and teens that they, and their thoughts, are important to us. Our interest encourages them to think about their behavior. Even when their thinking is not completely logical, active listening is a sign of love and respect.

How well we listen influences how well our children listen to us and to other important people in their lives.



Beginning in infancy, we can express affection by speaking to our children as we would like them to speak to us.

Through childhood they will imitate what we say and how we say it. As children become teens, they will continue to look to us for guidance, if we provide it in a way that recognizes their increasing maturity and makes them feel loved.

We are SPEAKING well when we:

- repeat the feelings, not the facts, the speaker expressed. “Sometimes you’re uncomfortable being with your friends because they’re curious about drugs.”
- don’t express disapproval or disgust, or make negative facial or body expressions.
- attack the problem, not our children or their friends. “I know it’s scary to be pressured into trying drugs. We can talk about ways to handle that.”
- explain how their behavior makes us feel, rather than criticizing and accusing them. “I feel angry when the table still isn’t set and dinner is ready,” is much better than, “You are so lazy. When are you going to set the table?”



- ask questions necessary to understand the situation, but respect privacy within realistic limits.
- encourage children to find and weigh options.
- suggest other ideas or other ways to think about the situation.
- encourage further discussion.



Encouraging conversation develops communication skills.

Adolescents often have difficulty expressing their feelings. Parents who are active listeners and concerned speakers encourage open communication and expressions of mutual affection.



Good communication skills reduce the need for attention-getting behavior.

As teens feel more comfortable about expressing their feelings, they can be more assertive in situations that could be harmful. When teens can share their fears and concerns—as well as what makes them happy—they are less likely to act in negative ways.



Try to:

- LISTEN actively.
- THINK about what others are saying.
- SPEAK with encouragement and respect.



Even without saying a word, a person communicates through facial expressions, body positions, gestures, and mannerisms.

Many times the unspoken actions are even more important than the spoken word. Here's an example.

Your teenage son walks in after school. You ask, "How did things go at school today?" He smiles and says, "Wonderful." That is the verbal message. There also is a nonverbal message, however. Your son's smile was fleeting, his eyes were turned down, and he headed for his room as he spoke.

**Nonverbal Messages Speak
Louder Than Words**

If you noticed your son's body language, you might guess that he did not have a wonderful day. You would probably feel uneasy about his behavior and assume that something was wrong. You could then take the time to help him with whatever his problem might be.

Remember that you, too, send nonverbal messages.

For example, when your child comes home, do you continue your work and ask, "How was your day?" without even looking up? You clearly show by your actions that you aren't really interested in your child's response.

Good communication can benefit your family in many ways.



It doesn't guarantee that your family won't have any problems, or that your relationship with your teen will always be pleasant. But communication is a powerful tool to use to help kids grow up healthy and ready to solve problems.



Have a good month!

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