



Tips for Communicating Effectively With Your Children

Communication is a two-way bridge that connects you to your child's feelings. Healthy communication between parents and their children helps youngsters develop positive personalities and good relationships with other people.

Healthy communication builds your children's self-esteem because it makes them feel cared for and loved. With caring parents to listen to their concerns, children feel safe and able to express their feelings and needs directly in words. Children who are nurtured with their parents' attention learn how to manage their feelings without overreacting.

A strong bond with your children also helps you feel close to them and understand their needs. Understanding your children in this way gives you the tools to help them grow and manage the inevitable frustrations of being a parent.

Build the Bridge of Communication

✓ Be available.

Children need to feel that their parents are available to them. Even spending 10 minutes a day with each child makes the bridge of communication stronger. Get yourself into a quiet, attentive mood before you start listening to your child or talking about something important.

✓ Be a good listener.

Children believe they're important when they feel their parents understand them. Being a good listener helps children feel loved, even when they're upset and you can't do anything to fix the problem. Ask your child to tell you his ideas and feelings. Try to understand exactly what your child is saying. What your child is trying to tell you is important to him, even when it may not be to you.

✓ Show empathy.

You can show empathy even if you disagree with your child. Let your child know you've heard and appreciate her feelings. Showing empathy means making sure you understand what your child is feeling. Restate what your child has expressed and ask if your understanding of her feelings is correct.



✓ Be a good sender.

Your child will be in a better mood to listen to you if he feels heard and cared for. Make sure that what you say, your tone of voice and what you do send a consistent message.

For instance, if you laugh when you say "no," your child will be confused about what you really want.

Be very specific about what you want your child to do. Use words to send messages, even with toddlers. Use feeling words when you praise your child's behavior. For example, you can say "I'm so happy" when your child puts his dirty clothes in the hamper. Encourage your child to praise himself as well.

Use "I" statements to tell your child what makes you unhappy about her behavior. It's better to say: "I was worried when you came home late from Jessica's house" than to yell "Why were you late for dinner again?" Tell your child what you feel and think, not what she should think or feel.

✓ Be a good role model.

Young children learn by copying their parents' behavior. If you use a lot of feeling words, it will help your child learn to do the same. Verbalizing feelings also helps children learn to control their behavior.

