



*Keeping
the Love
Lines
Open*

You can enjoy special rewards for being part of a family. These include friendship, love and closeness, sharing for support and understanding, and acceptance of each other just as we are. However, the needs of family members change constantly. Most changes are natural to growing older and wiser together. Honest communication and careful listening can help assure that your family stays in tune, sharing maximum love and support.

Review Your Family Patterns

Do you feel that you understand each other's needs? Do family conflicts reach a satisfactory end? Here are three check points:

- 1** Is your approach positive, starting with how you feel? For example, "I feel important when you listen to me..."
- 2** Are you specific about the issue at hand? If you criticize, are you constructive? For example, "You didn't make your bed this morning. If you need more time, we can..."
- 3** Can you negotiate? Even if you disagree on an issue, can you agree on a compromise? For example, "I don't

agree, but I'll try for a week because I understand your reasons."

Are These Problems Familiar?

Outside friends, school or work activities, separation of family members, and just plain fatigue can create problems. Messages become unclear because it's easier to blame or bully than to take the time to discuss things. You may hold feelings back because you don't want to "start something." As unresolved problems build, mutual respect can disappear. Finally, there just doesn't seem to be enough time or energy to pay attention to each other.

Try These Solutions

Here are standard guidelines for healthy communication.

- 1** Be honest and share feelings.
- 2** Listen and watch so you know when others are needy.
- 3** Develop a manner of speech that's open and clear.
- 4** Take responsibility for personal thoughts and actions.
- 5** Regularly discuss values and beliefs.

6 Encourage positive values, and act as a role model.

Create Quality Time

Your family may find that it's a lot easier to be patient with each other when all of you know what's going on. Some families set aside an hour a week just to talk about individual and group needs.

Some working parents feel that the first five minutes after they get home is critical. Regardless of how tough a day has been, taking the time for an individual greeting and hug says, "I recognize you." Tub time, tuck in time, kitchen time and other short periods can be loving when someone is willing to listen. A bonus is that when you pay attention to trivial things, your children may be encouraged to talk about the serious things.

Family Resources

Family counselors can help when there's no understanding or mutual effort to make things better. Each family member can learn to listen, to talk, to fight fair, to compromise and to cooperate.

FAMILY COMMUNICATION