

Getting Your Children to Listen

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When you talk to your children, do you find yourself raising your voice - a lot? Does it seem like they never listen to you, no matter what you say? Even after saying something ten times, do they still continue to ignore you? Have you been tempted to get their hearing checked?

Before you cart them off to an Otologist, it might be better to take a look at how you're communicating as a parent. With some good communication techniques under your belt, you might find that your conversations with your child will actually be - well, conversations.

Take inventory of your words

Have a seat and write down on a piece of paper why you think you have trouble communicating with your child. Take a look at yourself, and how you talk to him. Maybe the way you are coming across to your child is driving him away from

you, and is consequently hurting your chances of having a decent conversation with him. Sometimes children feel as if they are not being understood, or that their feelings are not being acknowledged.

Some phrases to stay away from are:

- "How many times do I have to tell you..."
- "If I catch you doing that one more time..."
- "What is wrong with you?"
- "Why won't you ever listen to me?"

When children hear any of these phrases, they immediately tune you out. Try phrases like:

- "I know you have trouble remembering, but would you please..."
- "Please don't do that again. You know that's against the rules."
- "What made you act this way? Can you tell me how you're feeling so we can work this out?"
- "It makes me feel badly that you aren't listening. Can you tell me what we can do that would help the situation?"

Be short and sweet

Make sure you speak in small “sound bites” to your child. Instead of going on and on about why they shouldn’t have done this, or why they should do that, simply use one or two words. A long lecture tends to get tuned out almost immediately.

For example, you might be saying, “Johnny, every time we leave the house I have to ask you to brush your teeth. Why can’t you ever remember? It’s not that difficult to do. Now, please go into the bathroom right now and brush, or we’ll be late, and you know what will happen if we’re late, blah, blah, blah...”

Instead, point to the bathroom, and say, “Teeth!” In other words, the more succinct the command, the better.

Listen and share

Listen closely to your child, and repeat back to her what she’s said. If she’s having difficulty at school - or with a friend - listen carefully, and then say, “It sounds like you’re really having trouble. I’m sorry.” Or you could simply use words like, “Uh huh.” “Okay”. “Oh.” “I see.” Sometimes all your child need is the opportunity to get it off her chest - and if you’re there to listen, it makes her feel all the better. And the next time you want to tell her something, chances are she’ll respond more positively to you, because you really listened to her.

At the same time, share your feelings with your child. If something he said made you feel angry or sad, let him know. For example, you could tell him, “You know, when you said that to me, it really hurt my feelings. I don’t like being spoken to that way. Please don’t do that again.” Remember, you are your children’s most crucial role model - so if you can talk about your feelings openly and honestly, they’ll take the hint and do the same.

Six Tips for Great Communicating

- 1) **Write a note.** Tell your child what you want to say in writing. Make it funny, a work of art, or just plain silly. Stick a note to the refrigerator, or leave it by her bed so she can read it when she wakes up. Put a sticky note on her favorite pair of sneakers. Always end the note with telling her that you love her. (And some X’s and O’s wouldn’t hurt, either)!
- 2) **Let him choose.** Let your child make as many choices as he can. It will empower him, and make him feel special and more independent. And when you do have to make a choice for him, he won’t feel nearly as powerless.
- 3) **Choose your words.** Use the word “we” in your discussions, rather than “you” and “I.” Switching out these words lets your child know that you’re in it together, rather than at odds with one another.

- 4) **Always show her respect.** Never call your child names, or ridicule her. It hurts her, and does absolutely no good. When name-calling or ridiculing occurs, the child tends to withdraw from the relationship, leaving an even bigger communication gap than before.
- 5) **Speak softly.** All parents yell. But try to stay away from yelling, as much as possible. The more you can find other ways to communicate, the better. Children only hear the yelling, not the words you're saying - so it's not an effective way to communicate. If you're angry, take a break by leaving the room, or otherwise separating yourself from your child.
- 6) **Brag about him!** When you say something nice about your child to other people, let him hear it. It will give him a boost and help him to realize just how much you love him, and how proud of him you are.

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