

The Family Times

A NEWSLETTER FOR ADULTS
WITH CHILDREN AGES 5-8

 West Virginia University Extension Service

Vol. 1 No. 8

Taking Time to Listen

“Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him.”

— Virginia Satir

Communication helps build strong families. Learning to actively listen and talk with one another is the key to good communication.

The greatest audience children can have is an adult who is important to them and interested in them. Parents who listen to their children with interest and patience set the stage for good communication.

The Art of Listening

Perhaps the most important communication skill is listening. Active listening is important for good family communication. Everyone needs to listen and be heard in the family. It is an active process of hearing and trying to understand another person’s words.

The first step in active listening is turning off the “noise” in our brains. Then focus on hearing what the child is saying. Interest, attentiveness, and eye contact are important.

Becoming a Good Listener

Becoming a good listener starts with (1) *building a relationship*. Simply letting children know you care about them builds a strong foundation. One key to being a good listener is to imagine what children are experiencing apart from your own feelings.

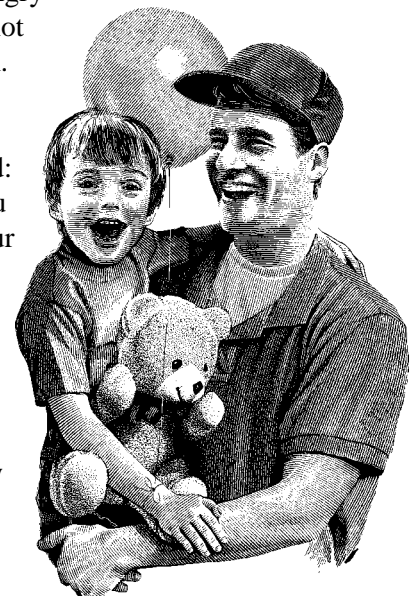
To Make a Difference

- ☆ Make time to listen and talk.
- ☆ Listen with interest and attention.
- ☆ Listen with patience.
- ☆ Ask sincere questions.
- ☆ Let them know you care.
- ☆ Be on the child’s eye level.

The next step is (2) *actively listening* to them and hearing what they say. Listening gives you an opportunity to better understand how your child’s thinking abilities and ideas are changing as they go from preschool to adolescence. By listening and asking questions, parents can help a child understand experiences and feelings.

(3) *Repeating* what the child has said mirrors his feelings and shows your attention. It confirms you understood what was said. Restating what a child has said is also useful when the child is expressing strong emotions. Young children need to learn that it is OK to have angry feelings, but it is not OK to act on them. When they say, “I hate my teacher,” you might respond: “It sounds like you are angry with your teacher; tell me what happened.”

Even families who communicate well are not conflict-free. They have learned to focus on solving the problem



rather than placing blame. WATCH OUT for the communication BLOCKERS: interrupting, ignoring, sarcasm, accusing, insulting, judging, blaming, and mind reading. Learn to recognize and overcome these blockers to good family communication.

Roadblocks to Good Listening

- ★ Being caught up with your own worries
- ★ Being too tired
- ★ Needing to stay in control
- ★ Not making time to listen
- ★ Feeling superior
- ★ Feeling inferior
- ★ Not caring
- ★ Being scared

Talking With Children

Supporting a child's talking enables you to listen and learn about the child. Children learn about language by speaking with others. Talking expands children's verbal skills, word use, and confidence. Talking is necessary for learning to read.

Engage children in telling you about their lives. Help them talk about themselves—their feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, joys, sorrows, experiences, growth and needs. Ask a child about the past, present, and future. Talk about everyday activities and interests. Respond to a child's questions.

Helping Your Child Express Herself

Some children need encouragement to start talking. Open-ended questions such as, "Why do you like this?" or "Tell me about your day?" can help them begin talking. Showing interest in children and their activities will encourage them to talk and make them feel important.

Be patient as you listen to your child. Children often take longer to express themselves and find the right word. Hurrying or correcting a child while they are talking is upsetting and confusing.

Remember to hear children out and respect their right to express their own opinion. Avoid cutting

Action Step

Spend 20 minutes at one time talking with and listening to your child today.

children off before they have finished speaking so they can fully express their ideas. By letting a child fully develop his ideas, parents gain insight into the child's understanding and abilities to reason.

Remember, when parents set the example for good listening and communication, children will learn this skill too!

The Book Nook

A good book to read with your child:
Heckedy Peg by Audrey Wood

References

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