

VIP Value In Parenting

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How To Talk To Your Kids (so that they will listen)

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When parents ask, "How do I talk to my kids?", what they are really asking is, "How do I talk to my kids so that they will listen!" Anyone who has tried to talk with a child has been frustrated by the following scenario, or something close to it. You call your child to come in the house to do their homework and they don't respond. So you try calling louder, assuming that they must not have heard you, until you find yourself totally frustrated and yelling very loudly, with still no response. If, however, you whisper the word, "allowance," they come running from across the street. This is known as selective hearing, and most kids are very good at it. One of the best ways of getting children to listen to you when you talk is to **LISTEN to them when they talk.**

How to be an Active Listener

One of the biggest complaints that children have is that no one listens to them, especially their parents. If Mom's eyes glaze over when her son is excitedly talking about his new school friend, then expect his eyes will also glaze over when Mom is explaining the importance of brushing his teeth. Listening is not the same as hearing. Hearing is passive. It is sound hitting your eardrums. Listening is active. It takes concentration and work. It means understanding your child's thoughts and feelings.

Use Reflective Listening

Occasionally rephrase to your child, using your own words, what you think they are saying and give them a chance to let you know if you have understood them.

Child: "I have a lot of homework to do and I want to watch a TV Show tonight."

Parent: "You're trying to figure out how to get your homework done and watch a TV show?"

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Child: "Todd is stupid. He never comes to my house anymore."

Parent: "You feel angry that Todd hasn't been coming over."

This will usually acknowledge the child's feelings and encourage them to keep on talking. Use *Open-Ended Questions* to clarify what is being said, and avoid *Closed-Ended Questions* that can be answered with "yes" or "no" or one word answers. Open-Ended questions ask for more information than can be supplied in one word. They encourage the child to actively listen. For example you might ask, "What did the teacher say about your project?" rather than "Did your teacher like your project?"

## Communication: A Two-Way Street

- ◆ Give your full attention - Stop what you are doing and face your child.
- ◆ Listen with interest and genuine concern.
- ◆ Don't interrupt. Hear them out. Avoid long explanations and lectures.
- ◆ Don't finish sentences for them.
- ◆ Watch for the feelings - many times there are feelings behind the facts.
- ◆ Notice body language - gestures, expressions and voice volume.
- ◆ Keep an open mind. Don't judge. Allow for a difference of opinion.
- ◆ Keep your emotions in check by not overreacting to emotional words.
- ◆ Avoid sarcasm, name calling and teasing.



### Yelling - The Roadblock to Good Communication

Parents yell out of frustration, from habit, to be heard, and because they don't know how else to get their kids to listen. The problem is that when a parent yells, the child reacts emotionally and no longer is capable of listening to what the parent is saying. This means the parent can no longer get their message across. Take some time to calm down before you talk with your child if you are feeling angry. If you find your voice rising once you start the conversation, take a break. It's okay to admit to your child that **you** need a "time out!" Take some slow, deep breaths, go for a walk or listen to some quiet music, and try again when you're calmer. Don't wait too long though, because your child will have moved onto other things.

### Helping Children Communicate Their Feelings

In their book, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish stress the importance of allowing kids

to express their feelings when they talk to an adult. Many times parents are uncomfortable letting children express their feelings, especially those that are negative. Empathy is the ability to feel another person's feelings. According to Faber and Mazlish, "... the language of

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empathy does not come naturally to us. Most of us grew up having our feelings denied." Parents may need to learn and practice new communication methods that encourage the expression of feelings. According to Faber and Mazlish, these are typical parents' reactions to a child's having said, "I hate the new baby!"

- ◆ Denial of Feelings - "Oh, you really don't mean that."
- ◆ The Philosophical Response - "Life is not always easy. We have to learn to share this world with other."
- ◆ Advise - "Try smiling at the new baby."
- ◆ Questions - "Why don't you like the new baby!"
- ◆ Defense of the Other Person - "How dare you hate such a small precious baby."
- ◆ Pity - "Oh you poor thing. I feel terrible for you."
- ◆ Amateur Psychoanalysis - "You are feeling displaced by your new sibling."

**Instead, why not try:**

- ◆ "You hate the new baby?"
- ◆ "It must be hard having a new baby in the house."
- ◆ A simple word like "Oh" or "Uh Huh" or
- ◆ a nod of the head or a touch of the hand.

These allow the child to continue talking rather than end the communication. Once we have shut down communication, children are not as likely to come to us when a real problem occurs. Kids need to know that parents can handle conversations filled with emotion. This doesn't mean we have to agree with what the child is

saying. Many times, just like adults, if the child is allowed to "get it off his/her chest" first, they will come up with a reasonable solution on their own. Listen first, and hold off on the advice. When the child is less emotional, they might "problem solve" on their own.

**Parents as Teachers**

The way a parent communicates with their child teaches the child how to communicate, not only with the parent, but with others as well. 'Do as I say and not as I do' just doesn't work. Children learn by example. Speaking to your child with respect and acceptance teaches them to do the same. Put your new listening skills to work: around the dinner table; riding in the car; taking the dog for a walk; or while watching TV.

Enjoy talking with your child. Take some time out from your busy schedule to talk and listen to your youngster. Observe how they put ideas together. Laugh at their jokes. Embrace their creativity. Cherish their youth.

Sources Used: *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen so Kids Will Talk*, by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish.

*Parenting for Dummies*, by Sandra Hardin Gookin.

For More information About Workshops on this Topic:

- Active Parenting/Parents 1,2,3,4,: 343-4191.
- Communication and Discipline Workshops: 342-0908.
- Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP): 343-7845; 291-0520.
- Parenting Education and Custodial Effectiveness (PEACE): 294-0890 ext. 4.
- Young Children: Priority One: 344-1234.

## Communicating With Babies:

**Did you know that babies also need to be talked with and responded to? They are like sponges and take in everything you say and do, even if they don't understand the "words." Communicate with your baby by: talking, repeating their "babbling," singing, use of nursery rhymes and finger plays, reading and laughing! You will be amazed as they "coo" along with you and try to imitate the sounds and gestures you make.**



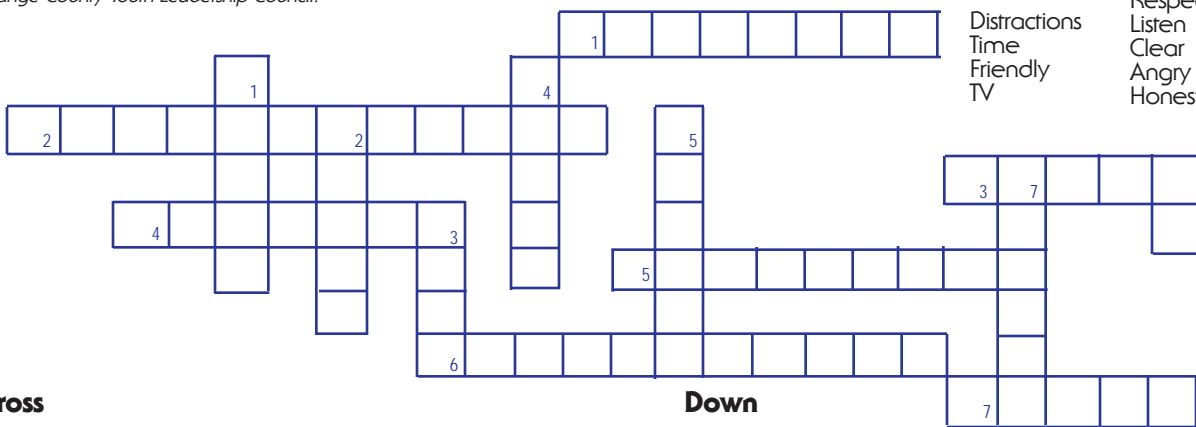
**Responding to babies when they cry for your attention is an important way to communicate to them "I am here to help you."**

## Help Your Child Learn the Tools to be a Good Communicator

Crossword designed by Eric Maxon, Adam Wodka, Matt Perry, and Alex Ragni of the Orange County Youth Leadership Council.

**Word Bank:**

- |              |         |               |
|--------------|---------|---------------|
| Distractions | Respect | Trust         |
| Time         | Listen  | Attention     |
| Friendly     | Clear   | Shout         |
| TV           | Angry   | Stress        |
|              | Honest  | Eyes and Ears |



**Across**

1. The environment must be \_\_\_\_ for good communication to take place.
2. \_\_\_\_ must be eliminated in order to communicate well.
3. When discussing a problem, it is important not to scream and \_\_\_\_.
4. Treat each other with \_\_\_\_when communicating.
5. When talking, give each other your complete \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Use both \_\_\_\_to observe.
7. Not talking out your problems can lead to \_\_\_\_.

**Down**

1. \_\_\_\_must be established early so that nothing is held back.
2. Makes sure that your questions are \_\_\_\_.
3. When talking, it is important to give each other an adequate amount of \_\_\_\_.
4. Talking out your problems is much better than just getting \_\_\_\_.
5. One of the most important things to remember is to \_\_\_\_ as well as speak.
6. Don't lie about your true feelings. Be \_\_\_\_.
7. \_\_\_\_ can be a distraction that hinders communication.

## VIP Value In Parenting

For more information on parenting education and/or the Orange County Parenting Coalition Action Team, contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 845 - 344 - 1234.  
www.cce.cornell.edu/orange



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