

Listening Well

Cheryl Roth
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I'm sure you've heard this before; that half of communication is listening. So true but it is probably also the most overlooked listening aspect of family communication. It's easy to take for granted that we understand those who are closest to us.

Within the family we create communication habits. These habits may not be the most effective way of communicating but they make us feel secure because at least we know what to expect. However, at various points in the parent /child relationship the communication dynamic needs to change in order to accommodate the child's growth toward maturity. Developing the ability to listen well without judgment is the best way to create a good rapport with your child that will last through all their transitions.

Don't be a Task Commander

As parents we sometimes get into the habit of commanding our children. "It's time to get up...eat breakfast... go to school...do your homework...do your chores...clean up your room...brush your teeth..." etc. Your entire day could be filled with task oriented commands, corrections and need based dialogue, and this could go on day in and day out. "Yes mam, Major Mom, right away!" (as your child salutes).

Is this really what you want your closest relationships to be like? Nobody plans this, it just happens unless we make an effort to communicate differently.

Focus on the Relationship



One way to change this is to make a specific time every day to focus your attention on whatever your child wants to talk about. Family Eating Lunch Together Your child may want to tell you about their day when they come home from school, especially if they've had an exciting or fun day. However, be aware that some children need time to chill before they're ready to talk, so don't push them into conversation if they are quiet. Dinner time or bedtime might be a better opportunity for some children to open up and share their thoughts and feelings. Take the cues from your child and when they begin to tell you things try to listen more than you speak.

Here are some ways that you can let your child know that you are listening and that you are interested in what they have to say:

Make eye contact, especially with young children.

Teens (especially boys) prefer talking while doing an activity or riding in the car.

Use nodding and facial expressions to show your interest and attention.

Occasionally restate (using different words) what your child has told you, to let them know you have heard what they are saying.

As much as possible, try not to make judgments. If something concerns you try to ask open ended questions that allow your child to talk more. This way they may come to their own conclusions about the problem.

Don't drill your child with questions. Reflect on what they say and ask only what you need to later.

Keep your body language open and receptive, don't cross your arms or legs.

Listen the way you would listen to a good friend.

By making a little time every day to listen well to your child you are building trust and understanding, and meeting your child's need for attention. You are also modeling the kind of behavior you hope to see them develop. They will be more likely to listen to you and respect what you have to say if they trust you and feel that you understand them. We all want to be listened to and to feel that our thoughts and feelings have value to the people we love.