

Family Communication – Expressing Heart Even When You’re Stressed

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The most important yet often neglected part of a relationship is communication. As a parent or partner you can easily get into the habit of giving directions and commands, expressing your expectations but not your heart. This can create friction and misunderstanding, even when you’re trying to make your point very clear and simple.

Putting the heart first is not a soppy emotional style of communication. Communicating with heart simply means to keep the bigger picture in mind respecting everyone’s needs and circumstances. In one sense, it is the opposite of emotional

communication because you must put your own emotions aside and think about your response instead of reacting or pleading.

If you want to convey information, it will be better received without emotional baggage.

Don’t be excessively sweet!

The goal here is neutrality. Being neutral doesn’t mean that you don’t care, it’s just a sign of respect. Neutrality creates an atmosphere of peace and calm where each person can think freely, without being worried about the emotional roller coaster of reactive relationships.

Communicating with excessive sweetness can be just as damaging as yelling, bribing and criticizing. It’s another form of emotional manipulation. Well-meaning parents trying to be ‘so nice’ to their children to get cooperation, often end up ‘losing it’. Then the situation becomes like a scene from “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde”.

The basic steps for communicating with heart are:

- Listen attentively
- Unemotionally assess the circumstances and/or needs
- Express your thoughts or expectations with respect

Too Busy to Think

If you’re like most parents you’re busy. You have a schedule to keep and responsibilities to take care of. You need to get things done and your children’s immature emotions can be frustrating and taxing. You might feel like you don’t have enough time. You’ve probably got so much on your mind that you don’t really want to listen and figure out what to say or do.

I often hear frustrated parents say, “Why can’t they just listen to me and do what I say?” You are the parent after all, right?

Learning to communicate in a new way might seem like a long drawn out process at first. But once you get used to having conversations in a heart-centered way it becomes quite natural. Here are a few techniques that can be helpful in learning to communicate in a way that respects those whom you are talking to, and expresses your heart of love for them.

- Listen for the underlying message
- Acknowledge and label feelings
- Restate what you hear
- Use “I” messages instead of “You”
- Leave out blame, shame and labels

(For more information on these points see the reading list below.)

You want your spouse and children to feel that you care about them. Even when you must correct or discipline a child, it’s because you love them. You care about their future so you try to raise them well. But sometimes your loved ones have difficulty ‘hearing’ or ‘feeling’ how much you truly care. This happens because your own emotions or distractions get in the way.



Casual Conversations

Day to day conversations while riding in the car, doing errands, preparing or eating a meal, can be some of the best times to establish a relationship of heart. Since you probably spend much of your time in this way, it's a good idea to put other concerns aside and enjoy the moment.

Doing an activity together is a perfect chance to practice listening. The more you listen to your children, the more you're modeling the way you hope they will listen to you.

Be Honest About Yourself

Honesty is important in all relationships. Sometimes you might be distracted by problems that make it difficult to focus on the present conversation. You can just say, "I'm sorry honey, I'm a little distracted by a problem I'm having at work. I missed what you just said, can you repeat it?" By doing this you model an appropriate way of dealing with stress and emotionally distracting thoughts. It also gives your child an opportunity to develop compassion.

You might be surprised that your child wants to know what's going on in your life. Sometimes by sharing your circumstances (in an age appropriate way) you can turn your problem into a teaching moment. You might find that you're the one who learns, because children are full of simple wisdom that we often forget when we become adults.

(First published as "Communicating with Heart" on familyschooloflove.wordpress.com/)

To Learn More:

[Siblings Without Rivalry – Adele Faber](#)

[How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk – Elaine Mazlish](#)

[Parenting From Your Heart -Inbal Kashtan](#)