



Parenting for Prevention: *Communication*

What is communication?



Communication is how we express our thoughts and emotions to others. We often think of communication solely as the words we say, but meaning is also conveyed through our tone, facial expressions, body language and even what we *don't* say. Communication is a complex process. Communicating with a toddler should be different than communicating with a teen. Understanding age-appropriate communication strategies, developing effective communication skills and improving listening skills can help parents feel confident in having effective communication with their child at any age.

Through the Ages

Communicating with your Child Ages 2-3

ENCOURAGE THESE SKILLS: Interactive conversations, reading books, singing, and playing word games

- Ask your toddler what he or she did during the day.
- Talk about plans for tomorrow: "Should we go to the library?"
- Play make-believe games, create characters or situations.
- Read your child's favorite books over and over – let him or her "read" to you.

Communicating with your Child Ages 4-5

ENCOURAGE THESE SKILLS: Interactive conversation and interesting play, reading, and playing word games

- Talk about the day's activities.
- Talk with your child about the books you have read together.
- Talk with your child about movies or TV shows you watch together.
- Keep books, magazines or other reading materials in a place where your child can easily access them.
- Help your child make their own family album with photos and mementos.

Communicating with your Child Ages 6-12

ENCOURAGE THESE SKILLS: Sharing of ideas, opinions and information

- Make time to hear about your child's day. Be an active listener.
- Ask open-ended questions to generate conversation: "What did you think of today's history test?"
- Take advantage of car rides or dinner time to make conversation.
- Talk *with* your child, not at him or her.
- Encourage your child to read books slightly above his or her competency level.

Communication with your Child Ages 13-18

ENCOURAGE THESE SKILLS: Sharing of ideas, opinions and information

- Ask open-ended questions to generate conversation: "What did you enjoy most about the summer?"
- Take advantage of down time to make conversation – on the way to practice, while making dinner.
- Discuss current events.
- Talk *with* your child, not at him or her.
- Recognize non-verbal cues.

Communication Tips for Parents

- Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk - in the car, during dinner, at bedtime - and be available.
- When your child expresses a concern to you - stop whatever you are doing and listen.
- Express interest in what they are saying without being intrusive.
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear.
- Let them complete their point before you respond. Do not interrupt.
- Repeat what you heard to make sure that you understand them correctly.
- Express your opinion without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it's okay to disagree.
- Focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during the conversation.
- Ask your child what he or she needs from you in a conversation – Advice? Help? Just listening?
- Model good communication skills – your child learns from watching you.



Active Listening and Empathetic Listening

Active Listening

Active listening uses our biological systems to process our child's spoken words. Our auditory system processes their words and our cognitive functions such as attention, memory, thinking and reasoning help attach meaning to those words. Our visual functions can identify mood and body language of our child. We also use verbal cues such as "OK" or "mmm hmm" to let our child know he/she is being listened to.

Empathic Listening

Empathic listening is done with our heart. Empathy is feeling *as* someone else feels. When we listen empathically we put our self in our child's shoes and put their feelings ahead of our own.

Words of Encouragement & Praise

Children flourish with positive attention. They need to feel cared for and appreciated. Parents can help children feel good about themselves by communicating encouragement and praise.

Here are some good words and phrases to try:

Yes *Very good* Way to go Wonderful

I like the way you do that I'm proud of you

Wow! *Great work* **What a clever idea** That's it!

I like the way you _____ ***I had fun _____ with you***

You showed a lot of responsibility when you _____

I appreciate the way you _____ *I like your _____*

I'm sure glad you are my son/daughter I love you

RESOURCES

Some of the information included on this tip sheet was adapted from the following resources

KIDS Health .org

http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/communication/comm_6_to_12.html

American Psychological Association

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/communication-parents.aspx>

Child Development Institute

<http://childdevelopmentinfo.com/how-to-be-a-parent/communication/>

Kids Helpline

<http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/hot-topics/communication-skills.php>

The Positive Parenting Center

http://www.the-positive-parenting-centre.com/types_of_parenting_styles.html

Parenting for Prevention is a Decisions at Every Turn Coalition educational series for parents and other caring adults to increase awareness and knowledge about important youth issues and to encourage dialogue about making healthy choices.

Please visit <http://www.AshlandDecisions.org/parent-tip-sheets.html> for our complete library of tip sheets.

Decisions at Every Turn Coalition • 65 East Union Street, Ashland MA 01721
www.AshlandDecisions.org • CoalitionInfo@AshlandDecisions.org • 508.881.0177 x8284