

Communicating With Children

by Kirsty O'Callaghan

Using positive and effective communication than with a child provides them with a firm foundation to build solid and productive relationships on throughout their whole life. When a child is heard they feel valued, just as when a parent feels heard they feel appreciated.

Children are a product of their environment, and this especially shows through with their ability to communicate their needs to the world around them. This can be shown either in a positive or negative way, depending on their role models.

Positive relationships between children and parents (or adult carers) are vital in building a child's self confidence and their ability to cope with life. These relationships are built on being able to pay attention to what the child is saying, (or trying to say), and respecting that their feelings and opinions are valid, and allowing the child to discuss how they feel without blame.

If a parent (or adult carer) can be a good listener and role model, the child learns how to be a good listener. If a parent can hold eye contact when communicating, the child will learn to hold eye contact and if the parent can be 'present' in the conversation without distractions, the child learns to be present when someone is talking to them.

From my own observations with child rearing, it is quite often the 80/20 rule with how children learn. That is 80% of what we DO and only 20% of what we SAY OR TELL THEM HOW TO DO. This means that if you are not paying attention in conversations, but telling them they must pay attention, a child will learn how not to pay attention!

So they learn to live in the world, act and form opinions on themselves based on the modelling of those adults around them each day. Having positive age appropriate communication and interaction with your children on a regular basis, either through example, words, touch, gestures or being attentative can bring about an amazing shift from feelings of unworthiness or misunderstandings to harmony and mutual respect.

As well as being a good communicator yourself in your day to day dealings, you can also do the following to encourage positive relationships with your children:

- Use positive phrases with children. Phrases that encourage and praise rather than blame and criticise.

- Listen to children. Listen with your ears, eyes and body. Time to time it is understandable to tune out or be thinking about something else as a child can go on and on and on...., however if most of the time you can stop and really listen not only will you be valuing the child you may just learn more about who they are.
- Build up children's self esteem. This can be done by taking the time to catch them being good, thanking them, setting them task that you know they will do well at and telling them often that you love them. If you do have to chastise the child focus on their behaviour not them personally.
- Use affirmative body language by using eye contact, getting down on their level not speaking down to them or over them, smiling, use a gentle tone of voice and lots of cuddles and letting them know you are listening by nodding and facial gestures.
- Encourage children to talk about how they feel and see the world; whether you know it is their real or imaginary experiences, it is all important to them right now.
- Take an interest in what they are interested in, TV shows, sport, friends, activities, teachers or whatever; even if it is not what you want them to be interested in. Be supportive in their explorations of what they would like to do and experience.
- When children start to realise their parents (or carers) are not perfect, avoid pointing out their imperfections. Allow yourself to do your best every day, and the 80/20 rule will follow.
- Talk about emotions with children to help them understand their feelings. This can help children understand the ups and downs of life and how to deal with or release feelings in a positive manner.
- Respect the fact that sometimes children don't want to talk to us, and instead of making them, just let them know you are there when they are ready or have the words to tell you about how they feel they will.

It is a good idea to keep in mind that children need to learn so much to grow up, that it is all about them. So instead of telling them or feeling they are just selfish, take a step back and just keep showing them how to be emphatic by honouring and understanding where they are at in their development and needs. Through doing this they will then learn to do it too, eventually!

When we can open the channels of communication, want to understand each other's point of view and can show the respect to listen with our ears, eyes and hearts, it can create hope, love, unity, harmony and the ability to overcome challenges. During these times of 'busy, busy, busy' this is a wonderful thing to have.

In closing, I leave you with this thought:
"If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others" - Haim Ginott.



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role. The techniques and strategies Kirsty uses focus on a holistic and individual basis; knowing we are all capable of greatness, with the right knowledge, tools and support.

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