



PARENT RESOURCE

PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

After a couple becomes parents, communication becomes increasingly important. Parents are often under a lot of stress, and they are at risk for neglecting their relationship, when in fact the relationship between parents may be the most important relationship in the family. Keeping the lines of communication open is not always easy. All couples, at one time or another, have trouble communicating.

This is especially true when the stress of parenting is considered. Communication takes work, but it is worth the investment. This handout contains some important information parents should know about communication. Knowing how to communicate effectively, and also knowing what gets in the way of effective communication are important not only to the relationship between parents, but to their children, too. As children get older they learn how to communicate by watching their parents. Therefore, parents must be effective communicators so their children will learn this important skill, too.

Time

Spending time together as a couple is very important for any relationship. Time, however, is not always easy to find when there are children involved. Therefore, parents should make a special effort to set aside special time to spend together. If time can't be found every day, that's okay. What's important is that parents regularly schedule time to be together. This can be every day, every other day, or once a week - whatever works for the parents. This special time can be spent talking together, taking part in some activity together, or doing anything else that interests both parents. What's important is that this time is spent communicating in some way. Special time together is not going to just happen. It must be planned for and protected by both parents. One to one time is very important to keep the lines of communication open.

Communicating Effectively

Another important part of communication between parents is learning how to do so effectively. If parents do not communicate effectively, they will more than likely pass on ineffective ways of communicating to their children. *To communicate effectively, words must equal actions. For example, if one parent is telling the other that he or she is not mad, but has an angry look on his or her face, is using an angry tone of voice and is standing with his or her hands clenched in fists, words do not equal actions, and effective communication is not taking place. When parents do this, they are sending mixed messages. Parents should be honest about their feelings. If they are angry they should find appropriate ways to express their anger.

Touch is an excellent way to communicate nonverbally. A pat on the back or a hug is a great way to show appreciation to either a spouse or a child. *Attending and listening are two very important skills to have for effective communication. Attending means giving complete attention to the person doing the talking. This can be done by stopping all other activities, looking the talker in the eyes, and by not saying a word. Listening means paying close attention to what is being said, not only through the speaker's words, but through body language, too.

Giving and asking for feedback helps head off miscommunication. Giving feedback means repeating to the speaker what you heard him or her say to make sure you got the message as it was intended to be received. Asking for feedback is a way of insuring that the listener received your message as you intended it to be received. Finally, listed below are some things that both help and hinder effective communication.

<u>Don'ts</u>	<u>Dos</u>
Instead of this...	Try this...
*Accusing, blaming, putting down. These types of statements put the respondent on the defensive, which encourages more of the same. For example, "You are such a slob. You always leave your clothes on the floor."	*"I" statements. Instead of finger pointing, state your thoughts and feelings in terms of yourself. For example, "I feel angry when you leave your dirty clothes on the floor."
*Interrupting. Interruptions can break the speaker's train of thought.	*Listening. Listen to what the speaker is saying. Wait for natural pauses in the conversation before speaking.
*Overgeneralizing and catastrophizing. This includes statements like, "You always..." and "You never..."	*Making qualifying statements. Try using phrases like, "Sometimes, you..." and "Maybe..."
*Lecturing and preaching. These types of communication will quickly turn off the person being spoken to.	*Making brief, to the point, statements. Such statements will allow for give and take required for effective communication.
*Sarcasm. The use of sarcasm can be hurtful to the person being spoken to. Sarcasm has no place in effective communication.	*Showing respect. Try to show respect and understanding for the other person's point of view. You can disagree but explain your concerns.
*Not making eye contact. This may send the wrong message to someone you're speaking with.	*Making eye contact. This will send the message that you're interested, listening, and involved.
*Mind reading. Try to avoid telling someone else what they feel or think. You may be wrong.	*Reflecting and validating. Tell the person with whom you're speaking what you're hearing and how you're interpreting what's being said. Ask for clarification.
*Commanding and/or threatening. Commands and/or threats are rarely effective. They often put the person being spoken to on the defensive.	*Suggesting alternative solutions. Try to work together to come up with solutions that are acceptable to both parties. Ask for feedback on possible solutions.

*Dwelling on the past. Once a problem or conflict is solved, don't repeatedly bring it up in future conflicts. Parents should allow one another to start over with a clean slate.	*Sticking to the present and future. Focus on the specific issue of concern.
*Monopolizing the conversation. Don't do all the talking. Both parties must make significant contributions to the discussion to facilitate effective communication.	*Taking turns talking. Ask for the other person's opinions on the issue if they are reluctant to talk.
*Remaining silent. Communication that is effective will not take place unless both parties participate.	*Talking. Express your feelings, even if they're negative.
*Saying whatever comes to mind. Try to edit what you say, so that you do not deliberately hurt the person to whom you are speaking.	*Following the rules of common courtesy. Try to be polite and courteous to the person to whom you are speaking, no matter how heated conversations may get.
*Yes-butting. Try not to find something wrong with every suggestion the person to whom you are speaking makes.	*Listening. Try to understand the other person's point of view. You don't necessarily have to agree with everything the other person says, but you should make an attempt at understanding others' viewpoints.
*Cross complaining. Try not to state one of your own complaints in response to a complaint the other speaker makes.	*Making an agenda. Try making a list of the complaints that come up in conversation, and deal with them one at a time. Add new complaints to the list as they come up.