

HABIT 5

5 Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood®

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood means that it is better to listen first and talk second. By taking the time to listen to another person, you reach a higher level of communication. Teaching Habit 5 to young children is done by first considering their age and development. Young children find it difficult to understand another's paradigm (point of view). This habit is best approached by introducing listening as a skill that should be practiced. Learning to listen without interrupting and learning to listen with your ears, your eyes, and your heart will help children build a foundation for Habit 5. Simply put, we have two ears and one mouth so that we can spend more time listening with the intent to understand.

Younger-Child Activities

1. To better understand how listening can help or hurt a relationship, try “pretend listening” with your child for a few minutes. Your child will be frustrated. Explain what you were doing and discuss how your child felt. Now have your child ignore you when you are talking. Discuss how it makes you feel when you are ignored. Finish the discussion by thinking of ways to let the other person know when you feel you are not being truly listened to. Remind your child that this is also an example of Think Win-Win.
2. Body language can be even more important than words. Play a game with your kids where you each try to guess the other's emotion (happy, sad, angry, frustrated, bored, etc.) without using any words, just body language.
3. Demonstrate how saying the same phrase in a different tone of voice can give the phrase a completely different meaning. Try emphasizing different words in the phrase “I didn't say you did it” and then have your child tell you how the meaning changed.
4. Read Chapter 5 of *The 7 Habits of Happy Kids* book with your child and then complete the Parent's Corner.

Teen Activities

1. Ask yourself what your biggest listening problem is. Do you “pretend listen”? Do you only listen to give advice or judge? Do you plan what you are going to say instead of really listening? Work to improve your listening skills and model good listening behavior.
2. Is there an issue you and your teen always argue about? If so, go to your teen and say, “Help me understand your point of view.” Then really listen without interruptions. When your child is finished, repeat in your own words what you heard until he or she acknowledges feeling understood. Then it's your turn to speak and your child's turn to listen. You may want to use a “Talking Stick” when you are having this discussion. Only the person holding the Talking Stick is allowed to speak and doesn't pass the stick to the other person until he or she feels understood.
3. Consider asking your teen to let you know when he or she feels you aren't listening. When it happens, thank him or her, listen, and share back and forth until your teen feels understood.