

ideas for parents

Easy Ways to Build Assets for and with Your Child

FAST FACTS

ASSET #2: Positive Family Communication

Youth are more likely to grow up healthy when they and their parents communicate positively, and they are willing to seek parents' advice and counsel.

30%

*of youth surveyed by Search Institute have this asset in their lives.**

What Are Assets?

Assets are 40 values, experiences, and qualities that help kids succeed. "Positive family communication" is one of six support assets.

* Based on Search Institute surveys of 217,277 6th- to 12th-grade youth throughout the United States during the 1999-2000 school year.

Open-Door Communication

A conversation starts. Your child's upset. You're tired. Pretty soon, the conversation heats into an argument. It ends when a door slams followed by silence.

Arguments. We've all had them with our children. Sometimes it may feel like most conversations end with slammed doors.

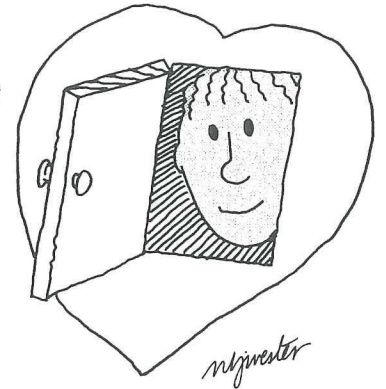
Though it can be challenging to develop the skills, being available for frequent, in-depth conversations is an important role we play in our children's lives—from the time they learn to talk all the way into adulthood. What we have to do is create an atmosphere of communication—an open door.

The trick with open-door communication is that we often don't realize we create invisible closed doors around us. We get preoccupied and don't pay enough attention. We're exhausted, and we nod off as our child is in midsentence. We jump to conclusions before our child says things. We assume the worst. We criticize our kids for what they tell us, so

they close the door the next time out of fear or resentment.

Sometimes there is no communication to begin with, and it's hard to get your child to say what's going on in her or his life.

Having an open door means having an open mind, an open attitude. It means listening to understand, not to advocate our position. It means being available when our children need us—and when they don't. It means taking good care of ourselves so that when our children want to talk, we have open ears and an open heart.



Helpful Hints

Tips that make it easier to communicate positively with your child:

- **Watch for hints: A child who hangs around usually wants to talk.**
- **Don't contradict what you say by doing the opposite.**
- **Be available, be open, be willing to drop what you're doing in order to talk.**
- **Talk in the car when you're side by side, rather than face to face.**

time together

Three ways to improve communication with your child:

1. Ask caring questions such as: How did band practice go? How was the math test? Was the talent show fun?
2. Ask your child's advice or opinion about an important matter.
3. If there is a problem at work and you come home upset, let your child know that you are not angry with her or him.

5 Keys to Communication

Quick Tip:
Listen more than
you talk.

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“When we communicate, we are telling others who we are and we are asking others who they are,” says Dr. Daniel G. Bagby, family counselor. He says there are five characteristics of in-depth communication:

1. **Reveal yourself**—Honestly tell others your thoughts, ideas, goals, and feelings.
2. **Jump in**—Actively start conversations. Don't wait for others to talk first.
3. **Be responsible**—Take control of your thoughts, feelings, and actions.
4. **Don't blame**—Take responsibility for your behavior without blaming or shaming others.
5. **Be human**—Share your weaknesses in addition to your strengths to develop trust and closeness.

Talk Space

Make it easy for your child to spend time talking with you. Keep an extra stool or chair in the kitchen, den, your home office, or workshop area. You'll enjoy this time together.

More Help for Parents

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families: Building a Beautiful Family Culture in a Turbulent World by Stephen R. Covey and Sandra Merrill Covey. In this book, Covey applies his "habits" to parenting and family-life issues to help parents build the strength of their families. (Published by Golden Books.)

talk together

Questions to discuss with your child:

- *Whom do you enjoy talking with? Why?*
- *What opens the door for communication in our family? What closes the door?*
- *Which topics are easy to talk about in our family? Which are hard? Why?*

Final Word

“We share the same things in my family—sweat lodge, making tobacco offerings. Sharing these makes for good communication and makes the family strong.”

—American Indian parent in the Minnesota Family Strength Project Research Report

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