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# Positive Family Communication

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Parenting is a powerful task that can sometimes be difficult and challenging. Positive communication is a family strength that can make this responsibility less daunting. Positive communication is needed at all ages for children. At some ages, children communicate and understand differently. Throughout these life changes it is important to remain positive.

## Use Communication to Build Self-Confidence

Communicating with family members can build self-confidence, especially in a child. There are ways to help children gain self-confidence through conversations. Be a good listener. Listening to what children say and determining how they feel are powerful ways of showing love. When you listen to your children and ask them questions you make them feel important. You are showing your children that what they have to say really matters; this improves their self-confidence.

You can build self-confidence in your children by giving them your full attention when communicating together. For small children, sitting them on your lap can bring all the attention towards the conversation. When talking to older children, place a hand on their shoulder to make the conversation more personal and to make them feel important. When communicating with teenagers and young adults sit beside them, not across from them. Sitting beside them makes them feel equal in the conversation. If you sit across from them, they may feel they are being talked down to or lectured.

When talking to a child of any age or another individual, try to keep the conversation in a positive light. It is good

for children to express their bad, sad, or unhappy feelings. But remind them of the good things about the situation or tell them things will get better and to stay positive. Keeping things optimistic and encouraging helps a child's self-confidence.

## Use Communication to Develop Positive Relationships

At every age children build relationships with their peers, parents, and family. You can develop positive relationships with children through better understanding their thoughts about topics. Positive communication can help develop these relationships by asking questions about their interests, activities, and feelings. Showing interest in what your children do creates and maintains positive relationships. Ask questions that are age appropriate for each child. Some questions and ideas to start conversations could include:

- Tell me about your favorite book and why?
- If you were packing a picnic lunch, what would you pack?
- What makes you happy?
- If you found \$5.00 what would you do with it?
- What is the best thing that has happened to you this week?
- Should there be time limits for adults and children on telephone calls or chat rooms? Why?
- What do you like best about the age you are now?

If you are having difficulty thinking of ways to start a conversation with a child you might try playing a talking game. Write down on pieces of paper questions about topics important to your family. Questions could range from “What animal would you like to be and why?” to more serious questions like “Do you think it is ever all right to tell a lie?” Place the questions in a box or hat and have each person draw out a sheet of paper and respond to the question.

## Discover Children’s Meaning of Words and Actions

As a parent it is difficult to understand the full meaning of your children’s words and actions. The best way to figure out what you don’t understand about your children is by communicating with them. Ask questions about their interests and activities, but don’t sound like you are trying to pry information from them.

For preschool children, when trying to understand them and their actions encourage pointing to things or using other words to help explain themselves. For older children, ask questions that they can really express themselves about. During teenage years, parents often feel they lose the relationship and verbal communication with their children. The popularity of instant messaging and text messaging allow children to communicate more with their peers and less with parents. The conversations your children have may use abbreviations or shortened words that you don’t understand. So to keep communication up, find out what they are saying and ask them what they are talking about with their friends. You may even want to have the teens help you get started with the technology.

The purpose of communicating with children is to show them love and caring and also to teach them about making positive decisions. Thinking about the messages you send can make you a more skillful communicator. It takes time and effort to become good at communicating, but it is worth the effort because good communication skills last a lifetime.

*“Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships a person makes with others and what happens to the child in the world about.”*

—Virginia Satir

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