

NASET's Parent Teacher Conference Handouts

Effective Communication Skills for Parents



REMEMBER THAT COMMUNICATION IS A TWO WAY STREET

Often times, parents feel they are effectively communicating with their children but in actuality, they are not listening to what their children have to say. Therefore, when speaking to your child, use a technique called, "I'll talk and you listen and then you talk and I'll listen" as a first step in developing communication with your child. This way, both you and your child feel that you have both communicated what you feel without interruption by the other.

DON'T ATTACK WHEN COMMUNICATING YOUR FEELINGS

Communicate your feelings towards your child by focusing on the behavior displayed. Don't make it "personal." Avoid saying "You are...". Rather, state, "I'm upset with the behavior you showed." The focus becomes on the act, not on the individual. Even if your child has done something to hurt you, place emphasis on your feelings because of the behavior rather than making it about the child. Inform your son or daughter about how the behavior affected you and also what you expect in the future from him or her.

TEACH YOUR CHILD TO LABEL FEELINGS PROPERLY

Children may have a very difficult time communicating because they lack the experience in labeling their feelings. Therefore, it becomes crucial for parents to assist their children in correctly labeling a feeling or emotion. You may want to say for example, "While the feeling you are expressing sounds like anger, it is really frustration and frustration is ..."

USE "CONNECTIVE DISCUSSION" WHENEVER POSSIBLE

When faced with a direct question concerning a feeling or a reason for some behavior, most children will shrug their shoulders in confusion or immediately respond, "I don't know". Instead of this direct communication, try "connective discussion." This technique assumes that you, as the parent, may be aware of the trigger (what caused the behavior to occur) and connects the feeling and resulting behavior for the child. For example, you may say, "It seems to me that you are feeling jealous over the attention your new baby brother is getting and that may be the reason for your behavior." At this point your child may have an easier time responding since the foundation and labels have been presented.

REMEMBER THAT ALL BEHAVIOR HAS A TRIGGER

If parents can trace back children's responses to the source or trigger, they will have a very good chance of identifying the real problem. Remember, all behavior is a message. For many children their behavior is the only means of communicating their frustrations or feelings. The problem is

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that their behaviors are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted, resulting in more problems and conflicts for parents.

BE AWARE OF NONVERBAL MISINTERPRETATIONS

Children are very prone to nonverbal misinterpretations. They frequently misread a look on a parent's face and personalize it into something negative. If you are upset, angry or frustrated with something other than your child, let your child know that fact in a verbal way. Try saying, "I am very upset right now about something. But I wanted to tell you that it has nothing to do with you and after I think for awhile we will talk." Ultimately, you want to be able to let your child know that you are upset but that it has nothing to do with him or her. If you do not, children will often generalize that they are the cause of your feelings

USE WRITTEN COMMUNICATION WHENEVER POSSIBLE

The use of writing to communicate feelings is an excellent tool. It allows parents and children to phrase thoughts as desired. Notes thanking a child for some positive behavior or telling them how proud you are of them are just some examples. Notes can also be used to register a complaint without nose to nose confrontation. Try a note in the lunch box each day letting your child know all the good things you see. It does not have to be long but it almost a sure fire way to make your child feel good.

TRY TO USE "DIRECT LOVE" AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE

The need to feel loved and cared for is a primary need for everyone. Direct messages of love require no interpretation or assumptions on the part of the child and should be viewed on the same level of importance as gasoline to a car. Examples of direct love include hugging, kissing, cuddling, holding, stroking etc. Most effective are the three simple words, "I love you."

MAKE YOURSELF AS APPROACHABLE AS POSSIBLE

The higher the approachability factor on the part of parents, the easier it is for children to express and show direct love back. As a parent, you may want to evaluate just how easy your child feels in approaching you with feelings or problems. It is important to ask yourself an honest question, "Am I approachable when my child wants to tell me something, especially if it is something negative?" If you are really not approachable because you get upset easily or yell, etc, you will need to make adjustments to the ways in which you respond. What you teach your child will often carry over to their future behaviors. In later life, your ability to be approachable may allow them to be able to direct forms of love in their own personal relationships.

For more information, visit The National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education www.napcse.org/

Adapted from:

The Special Educator's Survival Guide. Pierangelo, R., (2005). San Francisco; Jossey Bass

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The Special Educator's Book of Lists (2nd ed). Pierangelo, R., (2003). San Francisco. San Francisco; Jossey-Bass