

Active Listening Skills Enrich Your Parental Communications

Have you walked away from a serious conversation with your child feeling like your words were just not sticking? Instead of fuming about how hard it is to get your child to pay attention, try picking up the other end of the stick and focus on developing your family's listening skills. Start by looking at how **you** listen; as you become a better listener yourself, you will be able to help your child learn these skills.

It's easy for the important things to go out of focus when you are getting your family's dinner on the table, helping with homework and making sure your child has what they need for their extra-curricular activity. At times, children are telling us things and we just go through the motions of hearing, but we're not really listening. When this happens, we can miss little cues that tell us how they are doing and how they are feeling.

Think about a conversation where you felt the person you were speaking with really listened to what you were saying. It's likely that person used some of these active listening techniques that made you feel heard and understood:

- Eye contact
- Attentive
- Open minded
- Listen to what the person is saying and picture it
- Don't interrupt
- Ask questions to help better understand the situation
- Empathize with the person
- Give positive feedback

When you make a conscious effort to use these techniques, communication within the family will be enhanced. Your child will begin to mimic the behaviors observed from the adults around them, especially if you prompt them to use these techniques. Listening and hearing your child is crucial to their development. When your child is sharing a part of their day with you, it's important to show that you are listening; knowing that they are being heard provides a sense of security and reinforces good self-esteem.

These active listening skills translate into situations when you want to be an active parent and help your child make good decisions. Listening well does not mean you always agree with what your child is saying. Children do look for affirmation from their parents; **whether or not you** agree with what your child says or how they handled a situation, take a step back and listen in order to try to understand where your child is coming from before jumping in with your opinion, ideas or judgment.

Take that opportunity to think about what it felt like at your child's age; what things were like for you at that point in your life; what is a big deal to you then is not so important today. Remember that children relate to things they have experienced, as an adult and a parent, you can provide perspective that can help a child think about and understand their own experience. Your child learns about how to communicate in every conversation they have. Making some of these techniques part of how your family talks with each other, you will be benefiting their ability to communicate with their peers, at school and in social situations generally. Being an

effective listener helps make an active learner, as well as providing valuable skills for problem solving and resolving conflict. These skills also help build a strong foundation for your family's relationships and communications; while important in daily life, they can be crucial when faced with challenging situations, and provide a framework for working out conflict.

* * * * *

Try using these tips to help you get the best out of a conversation with your family and will build bridges to better communication:

1. Set up some one on one time with each one of your children, whether they are helping you make dinner, set the table etc.
2. Focus on them, ask them how their day was, ask open ended questions, make sure they know you are interested in what they have to say.
3. Try not to interrupt if they are telling you a story about some behavior you don't really agree with, try to ask questions that are not judgmental, for example; "why do you think you reacted that way?" "how did you feel after you had that reaction?" help them sort through the emotions and come up with their own conclusions.
4. Put yourself in their position, try to listen and not over analyze what they are saying, remember they are talking to you, they want to trust you with their stories and feelings.
5. Maybe you can share an experience where something similar has happened to you, and you can offer some comfort.
6. Restate parts of the story, so your child knows you are listening and this also helps you better understand the context of the story.
7. Repeat with each child, sometimes having these conversations as a group may have some family members feel left out and not heard.

Over time, using these techniques will help develop your family's listening "muscle." According to Stephen Walton from The Positive Parenting Centre website: "It's critical to model your capacity to listen and understand. In turn, your child will instinctively develop active listening techniques of their own. They will become less argumentative and defensive, become more democratic and develop emotional maturity." Be the best listener you can be to help promote good communication and understanding among your family. Active listening is not only about paying attention, it is about engaging in dialogue and one important pay-off is deeper and richer family relationships.

Further Reading

A List of 9 Books to Help Teach and Reinforce Active Listening

<http://www.parents.com/fun/entertainment/books/best-books-to-teach-listening/>

How to Use Active Listening with your Kids

<http://hybridparenting.org/how-to-use-active-listening-with-children/>

Listening is a Skill

<http://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/healthy-communication/the-skill-of-listening/>

Ten Steps to Help with Active Listening

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/womensmedia/2012/11/09/10-steps-to-effective-listening/#1717be7d3891>

Active Listening Skills Enrich your Parental Communication

http://www.the-positive-parenting-centre.com/active_listening_skills.html

Become a Better Listener

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/become-a-better-listener-active-listening/>

Everybody Loves Raymond Uses Active Listening

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4VOubVB4CTU>

'When I Was Your Age' And Other Pitfalls Of Talking To Teens About Stress

<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2017/04/16/523592625/-when-i-was-your-age-and-other-conversational-pitfalls-of-talking-to-teens>

Taking Action

Here are two family games that help sharpen listening skills:

Series of Sound

Using everyday items, you can incorporate hidden sounds into a family game. Challenge family members to listen for, draw, and repeat a series of common sounds. It's amazing how much everyone tunes out the sounds around them.

Preparation

- Collect everyday objects such as a stapler, book, paper, kitchen tools or toys and place in a plastic bin or cardboard box.
- Be sure to have a variety of items on hand to make noise with. Take turns making organizing a set number of these. For example, a series might include banging a book on the desk, bouncing a small ball, stomping your foot, clapping your hands, stapling papers, whistling, clicking keyboard keys, or shaking a bag of lego blocks.

Instructions

1. After dinner, have everyone at the table listen for sounds made only by the designated "sound engineer."
2. Every time a new sound is made, everyone should draw a picture of the item that made the sound.
3. After all the sounds are made, share everyone's lists, pass around the items drawn and recreate the series of sounds in order. Celebrate everyone's listening success and laugh about the sounds no one got.

The Last Word

Multi-tasking is an essential element of effective listening. Similar to a common improvisation activity, this game challenges students to listen to classmates while also preparing a relevant statement in their head. Small or large groups can easily play 'The Last Word.'

1. Choose a topic such as in the jungle, prehistoric life, an episode of a TV show, or a new pop song.
2. Select an order by handing out numbers or base your order on the seating arrangements.
3. The first player must walk to the front of the room and say one sentence that relates to the chosen topic.
4. The next player must immediately walk to the front of the room and say one sentence that starts with the last word said by the player immediately before them.
5. Play continues until all students have had a turn. If a student is unable to come up with an appropriate sentence within ten seconds, he is out of the game.
6. Game play continues in this fashion until there is only one person left and he is the winner.

Story Builder

Instead of playing 20 Questions on your next car trip. start a story where one person starts a story with a single sentence. Each person adds a new sentence, but only after repeating all of the previous sentences.

Check out this list of 15 Activities to Build Listening Skills (embed link)

<http://kidsactivitiesblog.com/52641/listening-skills>