

Communication Tips for Parents

Be available for your children

- Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk — for example, at bedtime, before dinner, in the car — and be available.
- Start the conversation; it lets your kids know you care about what's happening in their lives.
- Find time each week for a one-on-one activity with each child, and avoid scheduling other activities during that time.
- Learn about your children's interests — for example, favorite music and activities — and show interest in them.
- Initiate conversations by sharing what you have been thinking about rather than beginning a conversation with a question.

Let your kids know you're listening

- When your children are talking about concerns, stop whatever you are doing and listen.
- Express interest in what they are saying without being intrusive.
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear.
- Let them complete their point before you respond.
- Repeat what you heard them say to ensure that you understand them correctly.

Respond in a way your children will hear

- Soften strong reactions; kids will tune you out if you appear angry or defensive.
- Express your opinion without putting down theirs; acknowledge that it's okay to disagree.
- Resist arguing about who is right. Instead say, "I know you disagree with me, but this is what I think."
- Focus on your child's feelings rather than your own during your conversation.

Remember:

- Ask your children what they may want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings or help solving a problem.
- Kids learn by imitating. Most often, they will follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems and work through difficult feelings.
- Talk to your children — don't lecture, criticize, threaten or say hurtful things.
- Kids learn from their own choices. As long as the consequences are not dangerous, don't feel you have to step in.
- Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk and they may share the rest of the story.

Parenting is hard work

- Listening and talking is the key to a healthy connection between you and your children. But parenting is hard work and maintaining a good connection with teens can be challenging, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures. If you are having problems over an extended period of time, you might want to consider consulting with a mental health professional to find out how they can help.