



Building Better Family Communication

Two of the keys to having a successful family are allowing everyone the freedom to express positive and negative feelings, and working together to solve problems. The following tips can help you and your family build better listening and communication skills, which are the first steps in creating a happy home life:

- **Think before you speak:** Take the time to contemplate your message. Do not react hastily to what someone says if you disagree. You may regret what you say. Children are very perceptive about pointing out inconsistencies and inaccuracies in your messages.
- **Be as clear as possible:** Whether it is an expectation, emotion, question or other message, be very specific about what you are trying to express, especially with young children. Mixed and incomplete messages are very easy to misinterpret.
- **Stay on topic:** It is natural to want to avoid talking about the difficult things. Help family members stay on track by saying things like, "That is an interesting thought, but I would like to finish our current discussion first." Avoid bringing up a litany of past offenses, and stick to the topic of the moment.
- **Maintain consistent eye contact:** Nodding occasionally also conveys the message that you are still with them.
- **Match your tone and message:** It is tempting to break up a serious discussion with laughter. Do not use humor to avoid a meaningful, serious topic.
- **Refrain from judging or disagreeing:** When listening, aim to understand and don't interrupt.
- **Use "I" statements instead of "you" statements:** For example, rephrase, "You never listen to what we have to say," into, "I feel that you are not listening carefully to what we have to say."
- **Avoid criticizing, ridiculing, embarrassing, whining at or nagging:** Demonstrate that fair, constructive and open dialogue is the best way to settle differences.
- **Give each person an equal say:** Be sure to include every family member, especially young children.
- **Stress the respect of differences:** Enforce your family rules, but allow each family member a healthy means of expressing disagreement.
- **Avoid speaking on behalf of another family member unless asked to:** Let that person indicate his or her own preferences and opinions.
- **Be consistent with your partner:** Do not confuse a child by disagreeing or arguing with the other parent in front of the child.
- **Talk to young children on their level:** When talking to a preschooler, use language he or she will understand. Get down on his or her eye level to communicate effectively.

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