

Employee Assistance Program

Effective Communication with Children

Are you looking for ways to keep the lines of communication open between you and your child? The following elements of healthy communication can help promote positive parent/child relationships.

- **Set aside moments for connection.** Think about being present, even during small windows of time to talk. Use “in-between” moments of life, such as driving in the car or baking together, to remain accessible and tuned-in to your child. Kids can open up during these times. You do not want to be unavailable and lose the opportunity. When children get older, it becomes even more important to talk on their timetable. Some people with younger children find it effective to establish a clear routine for communicating, such as using dinnertime to go around the table and share one thing they were glad or sad about that day. Often this triggers discussions about school, relationships or other concerns in a child’s life. Establish some form of open “talk time”, especially if you have a child that may have a hard time competing with another sibling. For some, bedtime can be a good time for this.
- **Encourage by using “active listening”.** Active listening is when we just listen and take in what a person is saying and show signs that we are open to them continuing to share. This teaches your child that when they have a need, you are receptive to communication. You do not react in this stage. Remain non-judgmental about issues that are brought up and use nonverbal cues like nodding, or verbal expressions like “uh-huh”, “I see”, “what else happened?” to show that you are interested. Try to be neutral and avoid overreacting, lecturing or blaming. This step alone can go far in developing a better relationship with your child and will make them feel valued and heard.
- **Offer supportive guidance without telling your child what to do.** Through active listening your child may resolve a problem on their own. If not, you can ask questions that help your child find possible solutions on their own or ask them what they think would help. Refrain from putting your own meaning behind interactions they have had. If they don’t know what to do, you could say something like “have you thought about maybe trying to...”
- **Use reflective listening.** This is when you restate something back to your child in your own words, which can be useful in labeling feelings for your child. For example, “it sounds like maybe you were sad, frustrated, excited....does that seem like how you were feeling?” Your child might go on to add more to the discussion.
- **Open up when relevant.** For example, if you have a child struggling to make or keep friends, you could use an opportunity to say, “Keeping friends is hard work. I’m supposed to meet an old friend for dinner, but I’m considering canceling because I’m feeling tired. But I know this is something important to me so I should go.” Normalizing thoughts and feelings can encourage your child to share and process them with you.

If you are feeling at odds with your child or have other parent/child concerns, your EAP is here to help. Please contact us at the number below.

References

“Components of Good Communication”, Retrieved 3/2/2020 from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Components-of-Good-Communication.aspx>

Mager, Dan. “Communication Skills that Improve Connection With Your Kids.” Psychology Today, September 24, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/some-assembly-required/201809/communication-skills-improve-connection-your-kids>



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