



Communication with children is about more than words we use

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Why is it so difficult to communicate with my kids? This is a question that most of us ask ourselves more or less frequently as our kids are growing up.

We seem to ask it much more as our kids grow into adolescents. As someone who has raised two kids of my own, and who has worked with literally 1,000's of youth experiencing a wide range of problems over the past forty years, I still ask myself that question.

When I take the time to think about it and really look at it objectively, it always boils down to the same old things...when I am having the most difficulty communicating, what I am really doing is lecturing, philosophizing, ordering or otherwise trying to get kids (and adults) to do what I want, or believe what I believe.

Real communication, the kind that builds and maintains relationships with our kids is made up of a lot more than just words, especially our words. A frequently forgotten ingredient of real communication is listening. We need to listen not only to the words being spoken, but to the feelings, emotions, concerns, fears and beliefs that are being conveyed by our children.

This kind of listening takes our full attention and concentration. We can no more listen to something important our kids are trying to tell us while watching the Colts vs. Chargers than our kids can listen to the pearls of wisdom we shower on them while they are texting their friends.

Communication is a two way street and we have to remember that.

Another thing that is important to remember is that the earlier we get in the habit of truly communicating with our

kids so they know we will take the time to listen to them, the easier it will be when the topics are most important and more difficult to talk about as they get older.

The words we choose and our willingness to listen to the words of those we are communicating with are very important. But, some research indicates that words can account for as little as 7% of the meaning conveyed in a communication. This research indicates that facial expression can account for 55% and tone of voice 38% of the meaning of our communication.

Have you ever said to you child or thought "Don't look at me in that tone of voice." If not, you may have thought it's not what you said; it's how you said it that upset me.

Remember, our kids are thinking the same thing. If we can get past the "how they make us feel" and think more about how our communication style makes them feel, our skills will improve. We will be listening to their words and feelings.

Children are great imitators; just maybe they will imitate us by listening to what we say. This may not convince them to agree with us, but it will not give them an excuse to get angry and ignore or reject everything we said.

And, hopefully it will give them something to think about, just as we hope this article has done for its readers.

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