

Improving Parent-Child Communication

Text: Kim Chua; Photo: stock.xchange



Communicating effectively is one of the toughest challenges in parenting but those who start early and appropriately will foster strong relations with their children.

In today's fast-paced and dynamic environment, it is common to hear parents bemoaning the lack of communication and empathy between themselves and their children.

Sociologists and policy makers attribute this weakening of family units and relations to factors like media pervasiveness, differences in values and belief systems, hectic lifestyles and work demands.

The key to prevent and resolve parent-child conflict is to engage in effective communication with kids starting from a young age. Children

between the ages of seven and 12 are more inquisitive, hence they tend to raise questions and speculate about the whys and wherefores. Teens who are more mature have the ability to empathise with others and realise the implications and consequences of their actions and behaviour.

Communication Techniques

In the process of pursuing material comfort for their families, parents may overlook the fundamental need and importance of interacting and connecting with their children on a

deeper level. By understanding and applying appropriate communication techniques, parents can foster stronger bonds. Here are some useful strategies:

1. Respect is key. Treat them with respect regardless of their age. This means respecting their decisions, interests and preferences. Refrain from criticising their pop idols or mocking at their choice of music or style of dressing.

Instead of saying "Because I said so" which sounds authoritative and unreasonable, parents should provide logical explanations and convey their opinions patiently in a non-judgemental manner. This will help the kids realise the impact of their behaviour on others and take responsibility for their own actions.

By creating an atmosphere of trust and security that is conducive for open communication, parents encourage their children to express themselves fully without any inhibitions and fears of being judged, criticised or reprimanded.

2. Focus and listen. Focusing wholly on the child promotes active listening, which enables you to respond to both the content ("this is what happened") and emotions ("this is how it made me feel") expressed by him.

3. Cultivate appreciation. See the world from your child's eyes to understand his thoughts, views and emotions. This lets you appreciate his personality, talents, interests and perspectives, which will serve you well when helping him with decision making, social interaction and confidence building.

4. Acknowledge emotional reactions. Kids generally present negative feelings like distress and sadness through anger. Rightly identify the source of your child's emotions and acknowledge them using empathetic statements like: "That sounds frustrating" or "I bet that hurts your feelings".

5. Initiate conversations. Having regular, casual conversations enables you to be actively involved in your child's development and aware of his activities, social circle and peer relationships in school. Parents who initiate such talks also help their children broach

embarrassing topics and problem issues more easily.

- 6. Be there for your child.** Help him analyse and deal effectively in situations so as to cope with crises better. When showing your care and support, remember to draw a line between concern and interrogation. Ask questions only if you value what your child has to say. The same applies to situations in which you need to intervene or correct his behaviour or attitude.
- 7. Display affection.** Be open with your affections for your child and be surprised at what a simple kiss, hug, encouragement or pat on the back can do to him.
- 8. Give praises.** Just as there is a time to discipline and admonish, there is a time to praise and compliment. Give due credit to your child's achievements – even a simple praise can work wonders for his self-esteem.
- 9. Spend time together.** Be it sharing a good joke, shopping or playing computer games, spending quality time together helps build bonds

and the child's self-worth.

When implemented consistently, effective communication promotes and reinforces positive characteristics like self-confidence, optimism and adversity quotient in the kids. All these exert an affirmative and lasting impact on areas such as problem-solving, goal attainment and self-actualisation.

There are no shortcuts to improving parent-child relations. Parents need to realise that earning their children's trust can only be achieved by developing open and effective communication. Embarking on this early serves both parties well and lays a solid foundation as the children settle into teenhood – a phase when communication becomes more challenging and difficult.

Over time, your child will value your opinion and advice. Knowing that you will not judge him but trust him, he will treat you as his best friend and turn to you when he has a problem.



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