



Developing communication skills

Good communication is always a two-way thing. Listening to children is as important as what you say to them and how you say it. This might not always be easy – especially when you're tired, busy or have to deal with complaining or conflict – but it's important to model good communication skills so your kids can learn from you.

Approaching communication as a conversation between family members helps kids develop skills for life, setting them up for strong, respectful relationships and feeling able to ask for support when they need it.

Communicating as a family

Talking together and discussing everyday things helps family members feel connected. It builds trust and makes it easier to ask for and offer support. Making time to listen and show interest encourages kids to talk and helps you understand how they think and feel. Listening actively helps to build relationships and communication skills.

To get your kids to talk more, take notice of the times when they do talk. Often this is while doing everyday things like household chores or while playing games together. Use these relaxed times to get a conversation going with them. Similarly, it's important to make sure that the adults in the family have relaxed times to talk together.

Top tips for communicating with your kids

- **Make talking part of your routine.** Make time to chat with your kids every day. If your child wants to share something, give them your full attention and listen without getting distracted.
- **Let your child talk about whatever interests them.** Show respect for their interests, even if listening to a run-down of the world they've built in Mine Craft or their expanding Pokemon collection isn't the most exciting topic for you.
- **Talk about your interests with your kids.** Whether it's sport, music or cooking, sharing the things that make you happy is important too.
- **Show affection.** We communicate through our actions as well as words. Hugging and showing affection makes kids feel loved and content.
- **Reinforce that you're there for them.** Let your kids know that they can talk to you about anything. Setting this up early will help down the line as they get older and become more independent.

When things get tough

Talking about what's bothering us can be hard – for both kids and adults. We need to feel safe and supported, and trust that we'll be listened to and understood.

Asking how your child feels and listening non-defensively allows you to work together to solve problems. Blaming, judging or criticising will quickly shut down real communication and very often leads to arguments.

Listening carefully to the other person's perspective and explaining your own feelings and views ("I'm disappointed that..." or "I'm upset that ...") rather than accusing ("You don't care..." or "You've upset me...") helps to defuse arguments and supports effective communication.

Dealing with difficult emotions

Modelling behaviour when you're feeling stressed or upset helps kids develop their own strategies for coping with their emotions.

You can say:

- "I'm getting too angry. I need some time out to think about this."
- "I'm feeling really tense. I need to take some deep breaths to calm down."

Being ready to apologise, listening to how the other person feels and showing you appreciate their position is a critical skill for building strong and supportive family relationships.

Admitting to having difficult feelings is not a sign of weakness or failure. Instead, it sets a good example by showing that everyone has difficult feelings at times and that they are manageable.

Reference: <https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/age-6-12/raising-resilient-children/developing-communication-skills>