

SIX EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO USE WITH YOUR CHILD

Every child is different and how you create open communication with each one as a parent might vary. However, there are some basic communication strategies research has found as being important and effective with all kids – especially when they are used early on.

1. Use “door opener” statements. These statements encourage your child to say more and to share ideas and feelings. They tell your child that you're really listening and interested. They also communicate that you think their ideas are important and that you accept them and what they are saying.

Here are a few examples of “door opener” statements you might use:

“Wow”

“I see.”

“Oh.”

“How about that!”

“Really?”

“Tell me more.”

“That's interesting.”

“Amazing”

2. Use more “dos” than “don'ts”. Often, we know what we don't want to happen, so we lead in with a “don't” statement. The downside of “don't” statements is that they fail to promote the positive behavior you want to see. If anything, they reinforce the behavior you don't want.

Swap your "don'ts" with "dos" and it can sound something like this:

"Don't go outside, it's cold," becomes, "Stay inside please. It's too cold to play outside."

"Don't hit your brother," becomes, "Play gently with your brother."

"Don't color on the carpet," becomes, "Please do your coloring on the table."

3. Talk with your child, not at your child. Instead of you lecturing or only giving instructions, engage your child in a two-sided conversation. This requires both of you to talk and listen to each other. This can be challenging when your child has a limited vocabulary, but it's a good habit to get into because when your child is more skilled verbally they will want to talk with you.

4. Use "I" statements to communicate. As parents, we often speak to our children with "you" statements: "You're so messy," or "You're a pest," Using "I" statements can help you more clearly communicate how your child's behavior is impacting you without placing judgment on them.

Here are some examples of how you can turn a "you" statement into an "I" statement:

"You're a pest" becomes "I don't feel like playing because I'm tired."

"Your bedroom is a disgrace" becomes "I need you to pick up your things."

"You don't make any sense" becomes "I don't understand. Can you explain it again?"

5. No unkind words and labels. Some common, but unhelpful, ways of communicating with kids is to use ridiculing, shaming and name-calling. This communication style can lead to problems in your relationship with your child. Avoid using statements like, "You're acting like a two-year-old," "You're embarrassing me," or, "You're being bad." We sometimes use these types of statements to get our child to behave. But, more times than not, these statements only leave your child feeling disliked, can negatively affect their view of themselves and hinder positive communication with you.

6. Use kind words. Kind words create a good relationship and better communication with your child. Children who are spoken to with appreciation and respect also have better self-worth and feel valued.

Here are some examples of using kind words:

"Thank you for helping me with the dishes."

"You did a good job of getting your room clean."

"That really makes me feel good."

"I like seeing you play nicely with your sister."

"I love you."

Keep working on these communication skills. It can be hard at first, but like all skills, practicing helps. When you slip up, repair it with your child and start fresh. Parenting lasts for a lifetime. You have a lot of days and years ahead of you to get it right. Don't give up.

For more information and tips on parenting, visit www.knslearningsolutions.com/blog.