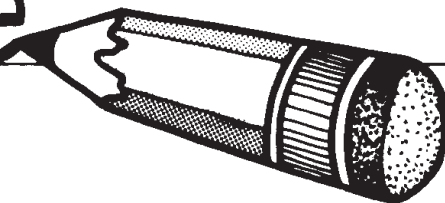


Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of kindergarten children
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*



Communicating With Your Child

"No one really listens to me."

Children in particular sometimes have this feeling.

Listening is an active process of hearing and trying to understand messages in another's words. Taking time to listen and to encourage self-expression are important in building and maintaining positive communication between parents and children. Listening gives you an opportunity to better understand how your child's thinking abilities and ideas are changing.

One of the best ways to foster children's language development is to have conversation with them. Conversation means a shared verbal exchange between adult and child, not just an adult talking to a child or directing a series of questions at a child. Sometimes adults find it hard to talk with young children. Here are some hints that may help.

Be interested and attentive. Children can tell whether they have your interest and attention by the way you reply or don't reply. Forget about the telephone and other distractions. Maintain eye contact to show you are really with the child. Showing interest in a child and her activities will encourage her to express her feelings and make her feel important. Get down on the child's level; don't stand and tower above her. Children tend to feel very close to an adult who, by expressing concern and caring, gets them talking about themselves.

Encourage talking. Some children need an invitation to start talking. You might begin with, "Tell me about your day at school." Children are more likely to share their ideas and feelings when others think they're important. Ask children the kinds of questions that will require more than yes or no or right answers. Simple questions such as, "What is the dog's name?" often lead a conversation to a dead end. But questions such as, "What do you like about the dog?" or "What other dogs have you played with?" may extend the conversation.

Extend conversation. If a child says, "I like to watch TV," then you in your response should use some of the same wording the child has used. "What are some of the TV shows you like best?" If the child says, "Sesame Street," your response could be, "What happens on Sesame Street that you like seeing?" Avoid asking too many questions, though. Provide some information – for example, "I think Bert and Ernie are my favorite Sesame Street characters."

Listen patiently. Children often take longer than adults to find the right word. Listen as though you have plenty of time. Hurrying children or calling attention to their use of the wrong word while they are talking is upsetting and confusing. Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking. If you are interested in helping your child share a conversation, avoid correcting grammar or pronunciation. This can inhibit a child. Correction can take place in a different context and you can model correct grammar in your own speech. As parents you can set an example of consideration by waiting your turn to speak.

Reflect feelings. Sometimes just reflecting a child's feelings back to him encourages him to tell you what's on his mind. Saying, "You're really feeling sad today, aren't you?" is more likely to invite a child to share and confide his feelings than asking, "What's wrong?" Restating or rephrasing what children have said is useful when they are experiencing powerful emotions they may not be fully aware of.

Child: "School is dumb! I hate it!"

Parent: "Sounds like you're pretty angry about something that happened at school today."

Children need to learn that it is OK to have angry feelings but that it is not always OK to act on them. You might say, "I know you are mad at her for breaking your toy and you feel like hitting her, but say it with words. Don't hit."

Be an example. Communication skills are influenced by the examples children see and hear. Parents who listen to their children with interest, attention and patience set a valuable example. The greatest audience children can have is an adult who is important to them and interested in them.



Communicating With Your Child's Teacher

During this first year of school, you can demonstrate how important you believe school is by your reaction to absences, minor illnesses and truancy. The policies you set regarding bedtime, television watching and home-based learning activities will help your child feel that what he does at school matters.

When you visit with your child's teacher, be ready to find out what is expected. When you know what the teachers are trying to achieve, you can reinforce those expectations at home.

If the teacher has some suggestions for improvement, try to listen and determine how you can help your child meet those expectations. Be sure to ask questions so you can understand the problem.

It sometimes is a good idea to have a list of questions ready for the teacher. "Does John finish his assignments?" "Can Susie keep up with the others on the playground?" "Is Bill too tired in the mornings?" If you've wondered about these things, write them down so you won't forget to ask. Try to provide your child's teacher with information that may help her understand your child's behavior. "Jane is looking forward to fishing with her grandparents this weekend. She may find it difficult to sit still and concentrate today."

Don't fall into the "Where have I failed" trap! If the teacher has some recommendations for your child, it doesn't mean your skills as a parent are at fault. In fact, it can give you an opportunity to work with the teacher and child to improve your parenting skills. Try not to be defensive. Teachers are attempting to guide your child in a positive direction, but they need your support. They are not trying to pass judgment on your parenting skills.

During the first year of school it is very important for you to bolster your child's confidence in her abilities and potential. An encouraging word, praise for a new work of art or a job well done, or an unexpected hug can help your child feel good about herself and her abilities. Be sure she knows that everyone differs in their talents and abilities, and that in her own special way she is an entirely worthwhile and precious person.

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with kindergarten children by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other nutrition, youth and family programs.

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