

Ways to Support Children's Communication Skills

by John Hoffman

Children learn important lessons about communication through interaction with parents. Here are some tips that will help you support your child's communication skills more effectively.

Model good communication and listening skills. When you are talking to your children or to others in their presence, try to express yourself clearly and confidently, and set a good example. Be polite and respectful, give other people a chance to talk, listen carefully, and ask questions when you don't understand.

Let them speak. This may sound obvious, but when children are having difficulty expressing themselves, adults often interrupt to ask questions that might help or finish children's sentences. Try to give your child time to finish what she's saying. For example, let her order for herself in restaurants and let her answer Grandma's questions without your help.

Teach communication skills. As children get older, it can help to point out some of the components of good communication skills, like how tone of voice and facial expression can affect how people interpret your words and the importance of listening as well as talking.

Don't over correct. Correcting children while they are talking is sometimes necessary, but it can inhibit their willingness to speak. So when possible, have your teaching moments a little later. "You need to speak a little louder in restaurants so the waiter can hear you" or "When you're meeting someone for the first time, it makes a good impression if you look them in the eye and smile."

Teach older children to check out what they think they heard or understood. It is very easy to misunderstand people—in fact, it is one of the most common communication errors people make. So encourage children to ask questions if they are not sure they understand what you or other people mean.