

## Communicating with Your Grandkids

Today's families have to deal with many issues—busier schedules, new technologies, and ever-changing day-to-day challenges are just a few of the things that you, as a parent, have to address. Fortunately, many of the issues you face can be made easier with open communication. By intentionally building good communication practices, you can ensure that your family remains strong, even when things get tough.

### Taking Time to Talk

One of the most significant barriers to family communication is time. It takes time to talk with your family members, and it seems like everyone has less of it to spare these days. Parents are working more, teenagers seem to be increasingly busy, and it gets more and more difficult to find the energy that it takes to have a good conversation. Setting some time aside to talk is one of the most important things you can do to start building positive communication practices.

- Expect all family members to share a meal together each day (or at least a few times each week).
- Many children don't like "just talking," so be open to conversations while playing basketball, taking a hike through the woods, working on a service project, or driving in the car. Don't always insist on eye contact if it seems to make your child uncomfortable.
- Remember that everyone is comfortable with different situations; some kids may prefer talking in public places like restaurants, fitness centers, or parks, while others prefer the privacy of home.
- Eliminate distractions during family times; turn the radio off when you're driving, or play a board game instead of watching TV.
- Designate a regular family time—have a weekly family night, a monthly family outing, or a daily check-in before bed. Do whatever works best for your family.
- Try starting conversations in new ways—instead of always asking how school was, greet your child with a reflection about your own day, such as "Hey, it's good to see you—something exciting happened at work today that I've been wanting to tell you about," or "Tell me something exciting about your day."
- Unless what you're doing is very important, be willing to stop and listen to your child when he or she has something to say. When you cannot stop to listen, explain the reason and make a plan to reconnect later. For example, you could say, "I want to hear more about this, but I'm running late for work. Will you tell me more about it during dinner tonight?"

Between work, school, sports, and social activities, families don't always have a lot of time to talk. Start being intentional about talking with all of your family members as often as possible, and see what it does for your family! It may be difficult at first, but you'll find that with practice, taking time to talk becomes part of your everyday routine.

## Communication and Emotions

It can be tough talking about emotions. Even parents who place a high value on emotions may find themselves using “I think” statements rather than “I feel” statements. Talking openly about emotions is important and forms part of the basis of positive family communication. Use some of the following tips to help your family successfully talk about emotions.

- Sometimes the best way to continue a conversation is simply to acknowledge your child’s feelings. Saying things like “I can see that you’re concerned with what your friends think” lets your child know that you understand what he’s going through and that it’s okay to share those feelings.
- Remind young children that everyone has feelings and that all feelings are normal. Talk about appropriate ways to express feelings, and introduce new emotion labels (sometimes “anger” really means “frustration”).
- Teach your kids the importance of expressing emotions in respectful ways—for example, if your child gets angry, it may be best to take a few minutes to cool off before saying anything. Think about how you’d like your children to express their emotions, and set a good example of this in your home.
- Make sure your kids know that you’re always available to talk. Whether they’re sad, stressed, happy, angry, frustrated, or feeling any other emotion, you’ll always be willing to talk about it and help them deal with it. Kids can forget this sometimes, so don’t hesitate to remind them every once in a while.
- Understand that your preteen or young teenager may begin to express his or her emotions in inappropriate ways again, as puberty brings on a rush of new emotions. It can be overwhelming, so stay calm and remind your child of appropriate ways to express her or his emotions.
- Your children learn from what you do as well as what you say, so if you have an argument with your child, make sure to model appropriate actions, such as taking time to think about the issue, using a respectful voice and tone, and not interrupting.

Part of teaching your kids how to appropriately express their emotions is to appropriately express your own. It’s important to set good examples for your kids, no matter their age, so they understand that everyone deals with emotions and is expected to handle them in appropriate ways.

- Share your own emotions—whether you’re excited for an upcoming family gathering, angry because of something that happened at work, or proud of your kids for doing well in school, let your kids know how you’re feeling.
- Choose your words carefully. For example, if your child does something dangerous, instead of asking, “How could you be so irresponsible?,” coach more positively by asking, “What did you learn from this experience?” or “How will you make a safer choice next time?”

- Model complex conflict-resolution skills, such as consensus, collaboration, compromise, and so on.
- If you need a physical release for strong emotions, make sure that you set a positive example by participating in an active sport or other appropriate method for release. Instead of storming off without speaking, describe your strategy by saying, “I’m so angry right now that I need to cool off. I’m going for a walk around the block to get rid of some of this tension so I can communicate more calmly when I get back.”
- Remember that your children are always watching and learning—if you catch yourself expressing your emotions in inappropriate ways in front of your children, make a point to bring it up. Let your kids know that you made a mistake and that you’ll try to do better in the future.

Talking about emotions is tough—there’s no getting around it. But it’s required for effective family communication and, once you start practicing it, you’ll find that it helps you deal with any of the emotions that you or your children are dealing with. So don’t avoid talking about how you feel—make an effort to be open with your emotions, and encourage your kids to do the same.

### **Listening Skills**

Positive communication is a two-way street: not only do you have to talk, but you also have to listen. And even though it seems like listening to someone else talk is easy, effective listening actually requires a specific set of skills as well as practice. By learning effective listening skills, you’ll not only have better conversations with your kids, but you’ll also be teaching them valuable skills that they’ll be able to use in the future.

- Active listening lets your child know you’re paying attention. Ask good questions, paraphrase what your children say to make sure you understand, and show that you empathize with what they’re saying.
- There’s more to hearing than just listening to words—pay attention to non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which may also reveal what your child is thinking or feeling. These are especially important with children, who may have difficulty articulating what they’re trying to say.
- When you need time to concentrate and can’t give your kids your full attention, tell them how long it will take and what you expect from them during that time. When you are finished, let them know that they can once again have your full attention.
- Your children can provide hints with what they are doing; if your child doesn’t usually hang around the kitchen while you’re making dinner, but asks to help tonight, he or she may want to talk about something.

- Even if you disagree with what your child is saying, don't interrupt them to share your opinion. Wait until they're finished with what they're saying, and then state your reasons for disagreeing with them.

Being a good listener isn't something that always comes naturally—it takes a concerted effort and a great deal of practice. Start making an effort to *really listen* to your kids today, and set a good example for them so that they become good listeners in the future.

### **Family Communication: Summary and Next Steps**

Talking with your family members is probably something you take for granted, but it's a very important part of building a strong, close family. By making an effort to continually improve your family's communication, you may find that you draw closer as a family and get to know each other better. And with the many modern technologies that assist both parents and kids in communicating with each other, effective communication has become easier than ever.

### **Other Useful Web Sites**

- Parenting Styles/Children's Temperaments: The Match — AboutOurKids.org provides an explanation of different parenting styles and children's temperaments, along with advice on how to create the best match between the two.

### **Books Available from Search Institute**

- *The Essential Guide to Talking with Teens* — Provide teens with self-esteem and self-awareness for teens with these tested, guided discussions.
- *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* — This book provides guidance on teaching your child to regulate and communicate his emotions.

### **More Books You May Like**

- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk* — The advice provided in this toolkit will help you improve the communication with children in your life, whether they're your kids, your students, or members of your community.

These communication tips were taken from the following website:  
<http://www.parentfurther.com/time-together/communication>.