

Communication Tips for Talking to Children

Give your child your full attention when they are speaking to you

- It makes the child feel that you care for what they have to say

Get on their level

- Show your child the same respect you wish them to hold for you.
- Bend or kneel so you are on the same eye-level as them.

Talk with your child and not at them

Praise your child when they do something right

- The more you praise a behavior, the more likely your child will repeat it
- Praise can also help boost your child's self-esteem and improve your relationship
- Praise should be as specific as possible

Use age-appropriate language

- Only use words that your child will understand

Use "I" statements and not "You" statements

- Make sure your tone is soft and even, not blaming.
- Always start each statement with "I": I feel, I need, I want...
- Then, follow the "I" with an emotion before explaining why.
- In your explanation, express...
 - Why you feel that way
 - Give reassurance of trusting and caring for your child (if relevant)
 - Express what you expect of the child gently, if they do not figure it out themselves first
 - The basic structure of "I" statements is: "I feel _____ when you _____ because _____."; however, this can vary for the conversation

Examples:

- "When I see you running inside, I get worried that you might break something or fall and hurt yourself."
- "I hear you want me to play. I'm feeling torn because I wish I could play with you, but I need to make the dinner and can't do both."
- "Because your play is so loud, even though it's great that you're having fun, I'm worried the baby will wake up and be upset."

Tell your child what they should do, not what they only did wrong

- Do vs. Do Not

Set aside time to talk and play with your child

- Having a special time together lets your child know that they're a priority, and it will help strengthen your bond.
- Try to spend at least 5-10 minutes each day on special time together
- Let your child lead the play and limit questions and commands as they take the lead away from your child
- Praise your child's good behavior and describe it to them, reflect their words and emotions
- Be enthusiastic, stay positive, and avoid criticism during this time
- Have fun and be silly

Actively listen to your child and provide feedback

- Active listening is the ability to focus completely on a speaker, understand their message, comprehend the information and respond thoughtfully.
- Reflect what your child says to show them you are listening

Reflection of feelings

- Help your child out by vocalizing their emotions
- For example, if your child is crying/seem sad, you can say "I can see that you're upset."
- Use this as an opportunity to talk about their feelings and clarify them

Make your requests important

- First, ensure you have your child's attention
- Then, speak with a firmness to show that you mean what you say
- Give the child a reason why they must do this thing at this particular time
- Ex: "James, I need you to pack away your toys on the table now please. It's important because there is no space to eat on the table."
 - Instead of "Can you pack away your toys? I've already asked you twice!"

No name-calling or shaming

- Avoid statements like "you're acting like a two-year-old" or "you're being bad"

Ask open-ended questions to extend the conversation