



# Tips on Communication

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## **A major key**

in creating, supporting and maintaining a family is **communication.**

This can become difficult when family members are apart. Family members can become disengaged simply because of the geographical separation, which can lead to difficulties when reunited. Family members need to get reconnected and learn to appreciate each other again.

Children need time to again get to know you and your expectations. For the child, parents need to communicate boundaries, expectations and rules, along with reassuring love.

As a whole, family members need to find ways to communicate effectively. This might sound easier than it is because there may be factors blocking communication.

If a child has been in another home, even a relative's home, that child may have picked up another style of communicating. Allow for communication to happen naturally.

Don't rush communication, it takes time. Children may just need a little extra time to learn to trust again, face fears, overcome resentment or adjust to life in a different surrounding.

# COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES

- Talk to your child in a non-threatening way. Pick your words carefully. Your child might need time to learn how to communicate with you again, especially if there were issues before the child left home. Direct talk can be misunderstood and viewed as threatening.

Talking to your child with the same respect as you would talk to an adult might help advance your conversation and allow your child the opportunity to open up to you. Children build their self-image from the messages, both verbal and non-verbal, they receive from their parents.

#### Example:

*"You forgot to take out the garbage!"*

#### Instead say:

*"As a team that needs to work together, I need you to grab the garbage on your way out, while I wash the dishes."*

—or—

*"I know you are older now, and therefore I don't need to remind you to take out the garbage."*

- Learning to use words that are **not** full of opinions or state your preference will help. It is important to use words that are **less** confrontational and **more open** to a reply. Pick words that do **not** belittle, attack or offend.

Practice communicating in front of a mirror. This allows you to see and hear what you are saying. **Focus on the words** that **you** choose, your facial expression and even your tone.

This is a great time to practice using "I" statements. Non-threatening words flow into your conversation naturally once you get used to it, but it takes practice.

"I feel like we are not communicating about . . ." "I am frustrated after I talk to . . ." "I would like it if we could spend more time together." "I have time this afternoon. Does that fit into your schedule?" "I need you to take out the garbage."

*By keeping the focus on you, conversations are less threatening.*

- When you have a serious conversation, it is usually easier if you are not facing each other. Sometimes facing each other can be confrontational and intimidating.

Go for a ride in a car with your child sitting in the back seat. This will put everyone at ease.

Put a puzzle together. This will promote conversation in a relaxing way. Work on a project together. When children are busy working on building, creating or even painting, they are more open to a discussion on serious matters.

Take a walk. Walking side by side can help. It is okay to walk without talking because you can then focus on the time spent together. Conversation doesn't have to be filled with purposeful discussion. It can be light-hearted and focused on the weather. This will also promote bonding.

#### Examples:

*"I know you had a Math test today, how did it go?"*

*"Can you tell me more about the test?"*


*"Look at this house, isn't it a pretty blue color?"*

*"I have always liked this color. Tell me what type of color you like."*

*"What type of sports are you going to try this year?"*

*"Did you see any of your old friends lately?" "How did that make you feel?"*

- Time together is important because it sends a message of value and love, which is so important to families. This is a great way to rebuild respect. Spending time together and doing things your child loves to do can promote bonding. It will allow their feelings to be recognized and understood.



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Children rarely have the opportunity to be leaders within the family, so doing activities they enjoy will encourage their development and strengthen your relationship.

**Examples:**

- Ask the child what he/she wants for dinner
- Then ask them to help make dinner.
- Young teens and children love to play games. Have them pick the game and make most of the decisions such as: *“What color do you want to be?”* *“Do you want to go first?”* This is another way to encourage conversations.
- Ask your child to pick out a movie that you will watch as a family. Therefore, it needs to be appropriate for all ages.

- Try to ask questions or have discussions that require more than a yes or no answer. Ask open ended questions that allow children to add their point of view or their opinion. It will reinforce that you value their opinion and respect their views.

**Examples:**

- *“Is it going to rain today?”*  
Yes or no?  
Instead say: *“What does the weather look like it is going to do today?”*
- *“Do you have homework?”*  
Instead say: *“Tell me about your homework.”*

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If you feel you have problems after being reunited with your child, consider the emotional factors related to the situation.



- Recognize when you are stressed and try not to take out your frustration on the ones you love. Stress can be a horrible thing within a family because it can cause adults and children to lash out at the people around them. When you are stressed, try taking a peaceful break from family life and focus on your needs or situation. This can reduce the stress you are feeling and protect the ones around you from misdirected anger or frustration.
  - Count to 10 before you respond to your child when you feel upset!
  - Take a parent time-out. Leave the room and address the issue later.

- Communication flows two ways. One part is the person talking and the other part is the person replying. This is **not** always verbal. Body language can be loud and clear in conversations.

It is important to acknowledge others when they are talking to you. Look directly at them, stop what you are doing and reply.

**Active listening** allows the child to talk. You can acknowledge what the child is saying through nodding your head, direct eye contact or repeating what is being said such as: *“You mean to tell me that school is difficult for you this year?”* **Acknowledge** what they are saying and feeling.

**“I see.” “Oh really?”**

**“Mmm.” “Yah, I see what you mean.” “I can see why you were upset.”**

- Allow your child to focus on happy moments in their life and **acknowledge** those accomplishments. *“Wow, you got a B in math. That is a hard subject, and look how well you are doing. I am proud of you.”* Everyone likes to hear good comments when they have been working hard. It builds self-esteem and allows for future communication.
- Express your feelings without attacking. This can be hard at first because it can be a big change in your communication style. **Don't say:** *“I can't believe you could be so dumb! Why did you leave the milk on the counter?”* **Instead say:** *“Next time you take milk out of the fridge, can you please put it back so the milk stays cold? I would appreciate that.”*

- It's okay to admit you make mistakes. Children and adults are human. Mistakes happen at times; no one is perfect. *“I wish I would have used two hands when I was carrying my plate of spaghetti, then I wouldn't have dropped it.”* *“I forgot to put the milk back in the refrigerator yesterday.”*

- Written communication can be less threatening without tone of voice or facial expressions. By writing a note to your teen, you can establish rules, chores or relay a caring message. Place a note on the milk that says, *“Please put me back in the refrigerator, I like to stay chilly.”*



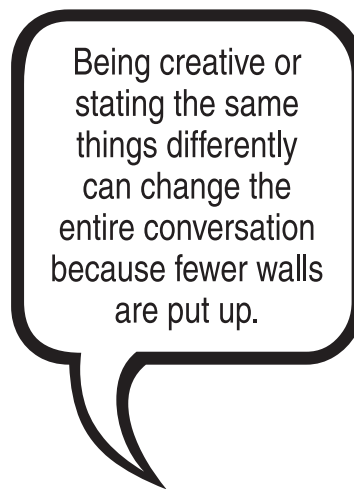
Being creative or stating the same things differently can change the entire conversation because fewer walls are put up. People are more willing to talk if they feel less threatened.

Thinking about body language, tone, perceptions of others, and type of language (non-threatening words) when you have a conversation can promote conversation or end it. Doing the little things that surround conversation make a big difference.

Children can often feel their lives are out of control. If a child was living away from home, that child may have viewed their world as being out of control.

That child may not be able to control where they live, what school they attend, when they go to bed or what they wear. This can be very scary. With change, adding the feeling of not being able to have some control over their life can create feelings of fear, insecurity and helplessness.

Children might use conversation to gain more control over their lives. Children also might become defiant to test a parent.



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## Additional information

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**For more information on this and other topics, see: [www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu](http://www.ag.ndsu.nodak.edu)**