



Because I Love You™

Parent and Youth Support Groups

Six Tips for Better Communication

Create opportunities for talking. It's no secret that Americans are overworked, overcommitted and overscheduled. Parents rush home from work to take children to soccer practice, piano lessons and Girl Scout meetings, all before hitting the drive-through window to pick up fast food for dinner. Mix in kids who'd rather text their friends than chat with Mom or Dad, and we have a family communication crisis.

So what can you do? Make time for talking by reducing the number of activities your family is involved in each week – the time it frees up for communication will be invaluable. And if you do find yourself in the car running from place to place, make a point to turn off the radio, the cell phones and the personal game players, and use that opportunity to catch up on the day's activities.

Insist on family meals. In addition to bringing everyone together for a wrap-up of the day's activities, insisting on a few standing family meals creates rituals and routines that kids come to expect and look forward to. Use the family dinner table as an opportunity to share what's going on in family members' lives

Go on individual dates with your children. Spending time with each of your children lets them know that they matter and aren't getting lost in the hubbub of a busy day or large family. Older teens might enjoy going out for a hamburger or a latte at their favorite coffee place. Younger children often enjoy going to the supermarket, especially when you let them select their favorite cereal or special dessert. Don't forget your spouse or the older family members who live near you. Regular date nights for couples and lunches with aging parents keeps those relationships healthy, as well.

Use technology to your advantage. If the family computer's been relegated to homework duties or surfing the Web, why not put it to work by creating a family newsletter that you publish monthly, just for your immediate family? Ask everyone in the family to

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contribute "articles" and information about themselves, and then print out a copy for each person and hand deliver it.

Remember the 80/20 rule. When trying to improve any relationship, listening is far more important than talking, so when it comes to family communication, listen four times longer than you speak. Likewise, think twice about what you say **before** you say it. Sometimes a parent's first reaction is to rant and scream, especially to negative news. Do your best to avoid this, and if you do verbally explode before your child is finished, apologize quickly and assure him or her that you're now ready to listen.

Create family traditions. Tucking the kids into bed at night, setting up a family movie night, attending religious services or creating special holiday treats are all examples of family traditions. Family members come to expect and appreciate these traditions, seeing them as opportunities to come together as a unit. If your family is short on traditions, there's no reason you can't start some now. Why not set up a bowling night once a month? Or grow a family garden? Or visit the same spot every year for summer vacation?

Maintaining positive family communications benefits your family in so many ways. Children may begin to feel comfortable sharing their problems with parents, which reduces the risk of peers having an undue influence on their lives. Parents remain connected and intimate with each other and their children, strengthening the family bonds. And all family members develop effective communication styles that can improve the quality of their relationships beyond the family home. Why not start talking today?

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