

PARENT TEACHING TIPS

... on Communicating with Your Children

By Bill Welker, EdD

Do you have difficulty talking to your children? Well, don't even think you're alone. All concerned parents have had problems communicating with their children at one time or another. I know I did, especially when my kids were teenagers.

As a teacher, I have read materials that have offered some practical suggestions for parent-child communication. Give some serious thought to the following suggestions for better communicating with your children:

*** Learn to listen. Know that you will eventually have a lot more two-way conversations with your child if you begin by letting your child talk, while you just listen. You may have to bite your tongue at times, but the results will be worth your efforts for wholesome parent-child communication in the future.**

*** Don't always react too quickly to what your child says. Children often do not mean or believe what they tell you. They may just want to shock you into replying in a negative fashion. Therefore, a "wait-and-see" approach is much better than a "respond or react" stance – if you really want two-way conversations to take hold.**

*** Eliminate the pressure. Often we use communication time pressuring our children to behave or achieve. We really aren't conversing, but telling. Such instruction ranges from what to do, when to do it, or how to do it. Many children will listen while just as many will be turned off.**

*** Open communicative doors with praise. When you praise, your child usually will say, "What else?" or "Tell me more," either verbally or with body language easy to**

understand. Thus, if you use praise, your child may surprise you by opening up and wanting to talk more.

*** Be honest with your children at all times. If there is one thing a child hates, it's dishonesty. Believe me, they know when someone is lying to them, be it their friends or adults. That's why you and your child must agree to be honest with each other. In fact, you should always hold the highest regard for honesty and the utmost contempt for lies. Never forget that communicating dishonesty is impossible because every word spoken is suspect.**

*** Don't yell at your child. In most situations, the level of communication tends to go down as the voice rises. Let's face it; yelling at our children will only make them fight back, and absolutely nothing will be accomplished. Children must have the opportunity to disagree without feeling that they are considered bad. If you and your child cannot agree to disagree, you rarely will have any pertinent conversations with each other.**

*** Know that short exchanges are "OK." Don't expect your child to arrive at the same conclusions that you do in brief exchanges. Rather, think in terms of many short conversations on the same issues or problems. You don't have to come to "big decisions" with your child immediately. Likewise, don't expect your child to be able to make instant decisions. Instead, be prepared to have several short discussions, with abrupt conclusions, on issues and problems that are important to your child, you or the family.**

*** Tell your child stories about your younger years. Children love to hear anecdotes about the past, including their parents' childhoods. They enjoy making**

comparisons between your youthful years and theirs. However, when relating such stories to your child, be truthful and don't always attempt to teach a lesson. Such stories should be fun and not a time for a message. So, be careful not to use "When I was your age..." narratives as remedies to problems your child may be facing in or out of school. Stories are most effective when they do not come during periods of stress or confrontation. In essence, they should be entertaining in nature, not instructional.

All parents want to help their children avoid the pitfalls of life. They desire a parent-child relationship that is wrapped with respect, sharing and interaction. Unfortunately, many parents feel as though they are walking on thin ice when it comes to communicating with their children. However, as previously emphasized, the key is to start by listening attentively to your child. This is the best foundation for developing a meaningful line of communication between you and your son or daughter.

One final note: let your child know how much you love and care for him or her. Do this even when he or she acts as though it doesn't matter – because it does. Should a serious problem arise, be supportive but don't give blind acceptance. You want your child to know when he or she is wrong. Likewise, you must never "clam up" or pull away from your child. Remember, you, the parents, are the ones on whom your children depend for love and reassurance.

In closing, I only wish that I had been exposed to this advice when and I was raising my children years ago. I made all the parental errors discussed in this article. My children are fine, but I know there could have been a closer bond

between us. Hopefully, with the suggestions given in today's column, you will not repeat the same mistakes I made as a parent.

Parent Proverb

“Discussion is an exchange of knowledge; argument is an exchange of ignorance.”

- Robert Quillen

Next Month's Column: “Learning Styles of Children, Part I”

(Editor's Note: Dr. Bill Welker is a retired reading specialist who was a K-12 classroom teacher for 40 years. He was selected as a “2009 Teacher of the Year” by the Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce. His e-mail is mattalkwv@hotmail.com.)