

Are You Listening to Your Children?

One of the greatest gifts that parents can give their children is that of listening to them. Involved parents pay attention to what their children have to say. They are conscientious about the things happening in their children's lives, including their circle of friends.

Because they genuinely care, they listen attentively to their children's words, watch their expressions, and monitor their actions, all of which send insightful signals to discerning dads or moms.

- Do you ask conversational questions?
- Do you reflect with interest on what your child says?
- Do you regularly engage in the exchange of thoughts and ideas, or do you just hear words, not giving these words your full attention or sincere interest?

Listening is truly one of the great gifts of love, a gift that every parent gives his child.

Active listening is listening and responding to each other so that each understands the other.

Active listening parents listen attentively:

- They focus on what is said.
- They give full attention to every word.

Listening takes much patience and effort. Parents have to want to listen to their children, which means they must listen attentively with interest.

Passive listening is hearing but giving little attention to what is said. Just hearing what your child says is not the same as listening to what he says. If you are too busy to slow down and listen to your child, you are busier than you should be. Passive listening parents half listen; they are preoccupied with other things, showing little interest because they feel that they have limited time and many things to do.

Your child's words are powerful. Listen to him, and he will listen to you. The following ideas will help you improve your listening habits:

1. **Be patient when listening.** Give your child time to finish what he wants to say without trying to complete his sentences or anticipating what he will say. Patient listening says, "I respect what you have to say."
2. **Set a time to listen.** A good listening time could be during or immediately after dinner or just prior to bedtime.
3. **Maintain eye contact.** Do not ignore your child by half listening, breaking eye contact, or doing something else while you attempt to listen. Instead, show attentiveness and interest, and when eye contact must be broken, reestablish it as quickly as possible. Quality listening and conversation build relationships.
4. **Avoid distractions.** Resolve that distractions will not keep you from concentrating on what your child says. Refuse to give in to the physical and mental distractions that compete for your attention.
5. **Stay alert and attentive.** You are better prepared to participate in a conversation when you are perceptive of every word your child says.
6. **Ask questions.** Take a few minutes every day to ask your child about the day's events, about friends, and about school studies. Listening considerately to your child's answers helps him feel loved and appreciated. Asking questions also keeps you informed about your child's spiritual, social, and school life.
7. **Answer questions.** Answer your child's questions honestly and lovingly. At the same time, try to understand why your child asked a question or made a certain comment. Discernment will give you insight, and it will help you demonstrate patience and love.
8. **Use praise comments.** The words "please," "great job," "I'm proud of you," and "thank you" yield dividends. Use praise comments when your child responds thoughtfully in conversation and in response to your comments.
9. **Give feedback.** Smile and give feedback at every available opportunity. For example, use appropriate gestures such as nodding your head or saying "Go on!" "What happened next?" "Really!" "Wow!" This confirms you are listening.
10. **Think as you listen.** Your child may be having a difficult time telling you something. Think as you listen. Encourage your child to say what he wants to say, and try to see things from his point of view. If he cries, do not try to stop the crying. While this is happening, have compassion and understanding. Instead of planning what you will say, just listen and use discernment and understanding.

Conclusion

Listening is more than hearing words. It involves interpreting body language, reading between the lines, and drawing inferences while displaying a genuine awareness of every word your child says. Always try to read your child's feelings and to analyze his words.

Keep in mind that

- younger children often have a difficult time saying what they mean;
- older children tend to withhold important facts and details.

An attentive ear can often be as beneficial as good advice. When you listen, you are saying, "I love you, and I genuinely care about you." When your child knows this, he will listen to you. When both the parent and child are listening respectfully to each other, relationships grow.

- Dr. Charles Walker