

BUILDING FAMILY STRENGTHS COMMUNICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Family communication is much more than just the exchange of words between family members. It is what we say, how we say it, why we say it, when we say it, and what we neglect to say. It is our facial expressions, our gestures, our posture, our vocal tones. Communication includes both verbal and nonverbal language. Words are the basic tools of verbal language. However, nonverbal language has many components such as:

- posture and body position
- facial expressions
- tone of voice
- gestures and mannerisms
- behavior and actions

WHAT IS COMMUNICATION?

Communication means to impart, to pass along, to make known, to give and receive information. The word “communication” comes from the Latin word “communis” which means common. Therefore, when we attempt to communicate we are trying to establish a “commonness” with another individual or with a group. In a basic sense we are trying to share.

Perhaps the most important communication skill is listening. Active listening is essential to effective family communication and is vital to hearing and being heard in the family unit. In active listening, judgment is suspended and the listener uses empathy to try to understand the person’s experience, feelings, and point of view. The key principles of active listening are:

- ENCOURAGE - Draw the other person out.
- CLARIFY - Ask questions to confirm what the person has said.
- RESTATE - Repeat in your words what the person has said.
- REFLECT - In your own words, tell the person what you think he or she is experiencing.
- SUMMARIZE - Reiterate the major ideas, themes, and feelings the person has expressed.
- VALIDATE - Show appreciation for the person’s efforts and acknowledge the value of talking.

CHARACTERISTICS OF POSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITHIN FAMILIES

One of the characteristics of a strong family is the ability to communicate. Here are some tips to help you improve communication within your family unit.

- Appear interested and be interested.
- Listen to each other - hear what other family members are saying.
- Be sensitive to each other’s feelings - try to identify the feeling.
- Do not jump to conclusions.
- Try to see things from each other’s point of view - imagine yourself in the other person’s position.
- Avoid being critical.



REMEMBER – family members communicate to exchange ideas, gain knowledge, and increase understanding of others. Good communication

skills are evident in families who. . .

- spend time talking;
- share feelings, joys, sorrows, hopes, dreams, etc.;
- state individual needs and wants;
- do not fault find;
- face conflict honestly and openly;
- resolve problems by “win-win” methods;
- show appreciation for feelings and ideas;
- develop speaker and listener roles;
- communicate verbally and nonverbally;
- recognize what actions say;
- communicate directly;
- are consistent in behaviors and expectations.

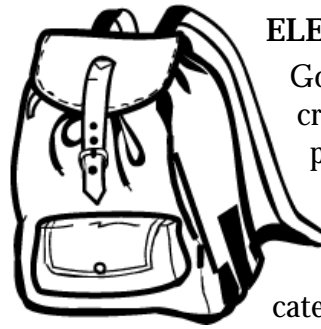
Communication within the family unit must include all family members. So often younger children and even teens are left out of family conversations. If you have preschool, elementary, middle/junior high, or senior high school age young people in your family, here are some tips. Communication is a two-way process, so it is important to understand and value ALL members involved in the conversation.



PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Communication with preschool children is critical within the family unit. Of the four language arts, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening is the first to be learned and is used more than the other three skills combined. The ability to listen well is essential for a child, not only to successfully acquire information but to process it and communicate it to others, as well. Three tips for good listening that will improve the preschool child's ability to communicate are :

1. Pay attention to the person who is speaking.
2. Listen for special “clue words” that tell you it is time to pay attention.
3. If you hear something you do not understand, ask a question.



ELEMENTARY CHILDREN

Good listening skills play a crucial role in the learning process of young children.

These skills help children successfully acquire, process, and communicate information. It is important to encourage children to show respect for the opinions of others. Children in this age group often pattern their communication habits after those they see modeled in their life.



MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH ADOLESCENTS

Young people in this age group are on the threshold of adolescence.

They see the world as a place of infinite possibilities, full of new people and new situations. So, it is important that they understand that their ability to be understood clearly by others and understand others in return depends on good communication skills.



SENIOR HIGH TEENS

Teenagers who have good communication skills will be better able to deal with interpersonal problems and build positive relationships. Verbal and nonverbal communication are used among teenagers. Therefore, it is critical that attention is given to body language and tone of voice when communicating.



ADULTS

Adults need to show through modeling how to improve communication skills within the family and in other relationships. Children can flourish in a family where people are

not afraid to show their feelings and where they know others want to listen. Adults can help by expressing themselves openly and by listening carefully to others.

SUMMARY

Positive communication skills will help you maintain strong family relationships. It's a process in which the whole family should become involved. Some key strategies for building and strengthening your family communications are:

- avoid letting aggravations accumulate
- be honest but not accusatory
- when you argue, do so constructively
- put yourself in the other person's shoes
- accept feelings - do not judge them

FAMILY COMMUNICATION

CHECKLIST

Do the following statements apply to you? Mark each statement T for True or F for False. If you wish, check your impressions against those in your family. Fold your paper to hide what you wrote and let your family evaluate you.

| My opinion | My family's opinion | |
|------------|---------------------|--|
| _____ | _____ | 1. I clearly say what I mean. |
| _____ | _____ | 2. I am an attentive and sympathetic listener. |
| _____ | _____ | 3. When I do not understand something, I ask questions. |
| _____ | _____ | 4. I let other people finish talking before I speak. |
| _____ | _____ | 5. I am straightforward and forthright in expressing my thoughts and feelings to others. |
| _____ | _____ | 6. I rarely use sarcasm and insults. |
| _____ | _____ | 7. I willingly listen to the ideas and feelings of others. |
| _____ | _____ | 8. When stating an opinion, I use words like "I think" and "It seems to me." |
| _____ | _____ | 9. I seldom get angry or hostile when someone disagrees with me. |
| _____ | _____ | 10. I am sensitive to nonverbal signals, like tone of voice and bodylanguage. |

The more "TRUES" you have, the more skillful you are as a communicator. What can you learn from this? Are there aspects of communication that you need to work on?

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Printed on recycled paper with soy ink



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Clemson University Cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture, South Carolina Counties. Issued in Furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work in
Agriculture and Home Economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914