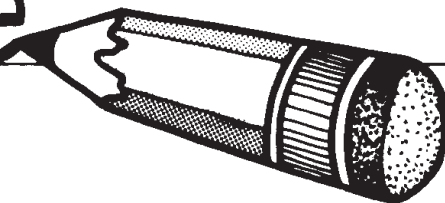


Parenting Pipeline



*A newsletter for parents of sixth-grade children
from the North Dakota State University Extension Service*



Listening + Responding = Communication

Do you speak **at** your child and **with** other adults?
Can you carry on an easy conversation with your
child and your child's friends?

One thing to be aware of when communicating
with sixth-graders is that personal questions often
put them on the spot and cause them to clam up.

We have all said at one time to a preteen, "My,
how you are growing! I wouldn't have recognized
you." An under-the-breath return comment from
a preteen might be, "No, I've shrunk," not out of
insolence, but out of embarrassment. We would not
make potentially embarrassing comments to other
adults. This same courtesy should apply to preteens.

Adults are comfortable with questions like,
"How are you?" or "How's the family?" But youth
have not had a lot of practice dealing with personal
communication and such questions can make them
feel awkward and uncomfortable.

Try to focus on something other than the child.
Visit about a person, event or object that might
interest a preteen: "What did your sister do on her trip
to California?" "What special plans do you have for
this summer?" "If you could go any place you wanted
for two weeks, where would you go?" "Why would
you go there?" Personal communication will happen
as conversation becomes easier and trust develops.

Parents: Listen to Others

"My friends listen to what I say, but my parents
only hear me talk." That's how some kids feel.

Parents also feel frustrated when their children
do not seem to listen to them. Learning to listen is
the key to good communication and conversation.
To teach children how to listen, we must first listen
to them.

We can improve communication if we listen and
respond positively to the unpleasant as well as to
the pleasant. Guaranteed conversation enders are
such statements as, "You don't really mean that!"
or "You shouldn't feel that way!" or "Don't argue with
me!" or "Don't talk back to me!" or "Nonsense, there
is no reason to feel that way!" Really listening means
listening without criticizing or judging people for what
they say. Otherwise we shut off sharing and only
teach children to tell us what is safe to tell us. When
you listen with total attention you are saying that the
child's concerns and interests are important to you.

When strong emotions are involved, we need to actively listen. This means observing the preteen's face, body movements and unspoken gestures to understand both what is spoken and what is meant. Your response should show that you understood what was said and should leave the door open for further discussion. For example, when a preteen says, "Leave me alone. You don't care what happens to me," you might say, "Don't be silly, of course I do," or "It sounds to me like you're feeling very hurt and angry." The first response ends the conversation. The second shows active listening and responding with understanding.



Parents: Listen to Yourself

It's easier to listen to others than it is to listen to yourself. If you are constantly being misunderstood, look at the way you've sent your messages. Listen to how you respond to differences of opinion. Do you really accept individual differences? Do you share your true feelings or do you withhold them? Listen to your tone of voice when you talk to your spouse, children or friends.

Does it change? The tone of voice communicates to the listener something over and above the verbal messages.

Communication is not done with words but with people.

Suggested Resources

"How To Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk" is an excellent book for parents to use. The authors, Faber and Mazlish, have developed a series of cartoon examples that help get basic communication skills on track in a quick and easy way.

If you have often thought that your family needs to work on how members communicate, this book is a start.

Another resource is a series of extension publications "Talking to Children about . . ." Death, divorce, suicide and AIDS are a few of the topics in this series.

Check for local workshops to help you set up a positive relationship with your child. The time to establish this skill is *now* — not during a rebellious teenage phase.

Call your extension agent for more information regarding resources and workshops currently available.

This newsletter is published for North Dakota families with sixth-graders by the NDSU Extension Service and distributed through your county extension office. See your extension agent for more parenting information and other home economics programs.