



# PARENTING POSTS

A newsletter for parents of kindergarten students.

## Communicating With Your Child

Healthy communication is the first step in building a relationship. Infants know the sound of familiar voices from birth. They will turn their head in the direction of a voice they know. To keep that kind of connection going from birth through adulthood with our children, try some of the following tips:

**Prioritize listening to your child.** Listening is an active process. Taking time to listen and encourage a child's self-expression is important in building positive communication. Listening gives you an opportunity to better understand how your child's thinking is developing. Commit to listening to your child actively for at least 10 to 15 minutes each day.

**Put away "screens" and model how to communicate.** Silence the cell phone, back away from the gaming console, put down the TV remote. These distractions interfere with important person-to-person communication. Instead, sit down and make friendly eye contact. You know how you like to be listened to, so model the same approach for your child.

**Have real conversations that matter.** Too many hurried families are speaking in "text" language. This is fine for "plz p/u mlk" ("please pick up milk") but not for building a large vocabulary or a loving relationship. Children learn about taking turns in a conversation at home when family members tell stories of their day. Sharing regular conversations is one of the best ways to boost a child's vocabulary and language development and learn to take turns speaking. Conversations should be a shared verbal exchange between parent and child.

**Troubled? Upset?** Acknowledge your child's feelings by listening closely and commenting appropriately. Help the child label his or her feelings. "You feel sad because you didn't get to go along to the store." If you choose the wrong feeling word, the child will likely correct you. Accept their feeling. Sometimes, simply reflecting a child's feelings, such as saying, "I agree, getting hit with a ball can hurt," will encourage a child to share their feelings

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### "How come nobody listens to ME!"

Young children sometimes may express frustration if they feel ignored or left out of conversations. How can you improve connections with your kindergarten child?

### Communicating With Your Child (continued)

**Manners matter.** Use the child's name and say "please" and "thank you" when you are making a request. "Nina, will you please bring that green thread to me?" "Thank you." Using the child's name leaves no doubt as to whom you are talking. Children learn courtesy and communication skills from the examples they experience. Model consideration by waiting for your turn to speak and not interrupting.

**Use brief, simple statements with a maximum of three directions at once.** "Jackie, please put away your books and your shoes, and feed the cat." Adding more details tends to interfere with the real message. Children may take longer than adults to listen, process and respond, so be patient and repeat your request if needed.

**Correcting a mistaken behavior?** Instead of saying, "Why in the world did you do that?" try, "Let's sit down and talk about what just happened." Be calm and firm but friendly while together you make a plan for "next time" to avoid the mistaken behavior.

**When emotions run high, wait for calm before starting the conversation.** Nothing "sinks in" when people are sad, angry or filled with negative thoughts. Children need to learn that having angry feelings is OK, but acting on them is not always OK. You might say, "I know you are mad at her for breaking your toy, but the rule is, no hitting." "Use your words to tell her how you feel."



**Volume control?** Your child is yelling. Use a quieter voice so the child has to get quieter to hear you.

**Living with a clam?** Encourage talking. Ask questions that require full sentences to answer such as "Tell me a story about something that made you laugh today." Be sure to listen closely so you can ask a relevant follow-up question that shows the speaker you were paying attention. "What is your friend's name?" often leads a conversation to a dead end. But questions such as "What do you like to play with your friend?" may extend the conversation.

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### Stress Less Activity

Stress is part of everyone's life. Even young children! Try this activity with your child to help reduce stress and enjoy time together.

**Make a "microphone" from a toilet paper or paper towel tube or purchase an inexpensive toy one. Invite your child to use it to tell a story about something that is important to them. Listen closely. Take your turn at the mic too.**



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