

“Slow to Speak, Quick to Listen: A Guide for Parents”

by Jim Burns, Ph.D.

A lot of unnecessary conflicts and problems between parents and kids can be avoided by following the simple formula of “*think* first, *then* take action.” Parents would be wise to *respond* rather than *react* to the challenging situations that our kids present us with. Of course, these things are much easier said than done, but a key principle to accomplishing this is found in *listening*.

Listening is one of the greatest gifts you can offer your children. In listening, you show that your kids have great value to you. My problem is that when my children are wrong or have a poor attitude, I want to immediately correct them instead of honor them by simply listening. A young girl recently said to me, “I’ve quit sharing and telling my mom anything because I know I will just get a lecture. Mom wants a relationship with me, but she is not willing to sometimes just listen to me and leave it at that.” Good observation.

Active listening doesn’t come easily for most parents. Yet taking the time to really pay attention, show empathy and listen to our children may be the most important part of long-lasting and healthy communication between parents and children. Recently, when discussing the need to listen more effectively, one mother said, “I try to listen. I really do. But I guess I rarely follow through. Too often I break into the middle of a story that I perceive isn’t important or I already know where my child is going with it and give my opinion. Life is so complicated and busy that I wonder if my listening while multitasking ever bothers my children.” Of course it does.

I think it is time to put down the newspaper or let the dishes wait or record the ball game and find ways to communicate by simply listening to our children talk. Here are some important components of being a good listener:

1. A genuine desire to really listen to your child – providing undivided attention.
2. Looking past the content of the words, taking notice of tone and body language.
3. A willingness to accept your child’s feelings and emotions whether your child is right or wrong.
4. The ability to accept not always being right.
5. A nonjudgmental attitude.
6. Good eye contact.
7. Being attentive through body language.

8. Expressing to your child that you feel honored to have the kind of relationship in which they share their heart with you.
9. Appropriate verbal responses. (Good listening doesn't just mean giving blank stares, but replying verbally in ways that connect and assure your child that you are listening to them.)
10. A willingness not only to listen but also to keep in touch and be supportive.

(Excerpted and adapted from the book, [The 10 Building Blocks for a Happy Family](#) by Jim Burns, Ph.D. [Click here](#) to order a copy.)