

# LISTENING SKILLS

## YOU CAN'T UNDERSTAND IF YOU CAN'T HEAR

Probably the single MOST IMPORTANT skill parents need to learn in order to have a better relationship with their teenagers is how to LISTEN. You had your chance to talk when they were younger and still *listening*. Now teenagers want to feel that their ideas and their feelings are understood, valued, and accepted by their parents. This does not mean that you will agree with their thoughts and perceptions. However, it's important that you validate their reality and their separateness as a person. Here are some tips to help you talk and listen with your child.

**BE OPEN:** Encourage your teenager to talk to you by using verbal signals like, "yes" and "uh huh". Take the time out from your chores to stop and listen. So often we are busy when our children approach us, and if we go on working, the message is "so what?" It can be a powerful message of love and support if we stop and say, "I can tell this is important to you. Let me put this aside for a minute so we can talk".

**CLARIFY:** Ask questions to get more information or check to see if you understand. Say things like, "Do you mean....? Would you tell me more about...?"

**RESTATE:** Repeat the main points. Put ideas into your own words to let him/her know you are listening. For example, "So, she said she would call and then she never did..."

**REFLECT FEELINGS:** Listen to hear how your son/daughter FEELS. Say things like, "I'll bet you're really mad about that!" This shows you care and helps your child think about his feelings.

**SUMMARIZE:** Go over the main ideas, feelings, and problems, expressed. Try, "So your two main problems are..."

**VALIDATE:** Show that you appreciate and respect your child's sharing of thoughts, feelings. Let them know you're glad you were included in the conversation. "Thanks for telling me about that" or "That must have been hard for you to go through." "Thank you for letting me know."

## BLOCKERS TO AVOID

None of the above works if you return to old habits and insert many of the communication blockers that seem to come so natural to us as parents. Try to avoid these sure-fire turn offs to your child's attempts to communicate with you.

### RESCUING/EXPLAINING

Most important, DO NOT become a problem solver, the advice giver. If your child really begs you for a solution, try brainstorming possibilities with him/her, but beware! If you give advice, it may not work, and it may be more difficult for your child to learn to take responsibility because the outcome will always be your fault

### JUDGEMENT PASSER

Put aside your judgment hat. If teenagers fear that you will immediately launch into a lecture about right and wrong, they will avoid bringing you their problems. Since early childhood you have instilled in them a value system. Call upon it now by asking what **they** feel is right.

### DIRECTING/ORDERING

Avoid telling your child what to do in such a way that it leaves little or no room for choice and/or negotiation.

### USING "ADULTISMS"

Adultism-ing is a process in relationships of requiring other people to read our minds and to think as we do. Examples of this sound like... "How come you never . . .? Why can't you ever..? Surely, you realize...How many times do I have to tell you?"