

PREVENTING THE “NUTHIN’S”

By Kathryn Kvolts

Your child comes home from school and you say, “Hi, honey, how was school?” Your child answers abruptly, “Okay.” You attempt again to get some communication going between you and your child. “Well, what did you do today?” Your child retorts, “Nuthin.” Your heart sinks to the bottom of your stomach, feeling frustrated, you respond, “Nuthin’?” How could you do nuthin’ ALL day?”

Sound familiar? Sometimes getting our children to talk to us feels like pulling a heavy suitcase without rollers! We use lots of effort for very little response. Here are some ideas on ways to build your communication skills with your child which will help create the close relationship you both want.

1. Know your child.

Some children need some quiet time after they come home from school and don’t want to talk. They may do best talking at dinner or at bedtime. Some teenagers often see our questions as prying. At this stage in their development, they want more privacy. It is very important that we honor our child’s wishes and their own ways of sharing details with us. Quit pressing for immediate answers, even when you are dying inside to know what is going on in the mind of your teen.

2. Share your day with your child.

Talk briefly about what happened in your day. Share a funny story or a situation at work which might have you frustrated. Express your own feelings. You may even want to ask your child’s advice about this situation.

3. Ask questions that require more than a “yes” or “no” answer.

Instead of asking if your child has homework, ask, “What do you have for homework tonight?” Allow her to teach you something that she is learning about in school. Be sincerely interested and appreciative of what she shares.

4. Ask questions about situations from previous talks.

If your child told you on Monday a friend was sick, on Thursday, remember to ask him how his friend is doing. This helps your child feel like you really listened and you care enough about what is going on in his life to remember.

5. Use feeling encouragers instead of feeling stoppers.

Feelings are shared most often when the person listening “honors” them. Some things we say to our children discourage them from wanting to communicate. Consider the following examples of feeling stoppers and feeling encouragers. Strive to make your communications with your child more encouraging.

Feeling Stoppers

Deny Feelings “Oh, Beth, you don’t really want to send your baby sister back!”

Solve the Problem	“Here, let me call Johnny’s mother. I’ll handle this.”
Use Guilt	“How could you get a D on your report card?”
Feel Sorry For	“Oh, honey, you poor dear. Susie didn’t really mean it when she called you a big green toad!”
Minimize	“Not being in being invited to the party isn’t the end of the world. Get over it! There will be other parties you can go to!”

Feeling Encouragers

Listen Intently As often as possible, stop what you are doing and focus all your attention on what your child is saying. If you can’t listen completely at the moment, give him a time when you will be able to listen to him intently.

Validate Feelings “I can understand why you want to send your baby sister back. It is hard to share your things with her!”

Invite Expression of Feeling “How did you feel about that?”

Be Empathetic “I understand. If that happened to me, I might feel the same way.”

Identify Feelings “It looks like you’re feeling sad about that.”

Until the age of seven, children may have difficulty identifying how they are feeling. Identifying feelings can help your child sort out what he is feeling and which then can lead to resolution.

Ask Questions “How could you handle that? What is one thing you could do to improve on that?”

6. Think before you talk.

Before you start talking to your child about how they are feeling, ask yourself, “Is what I am about to say going to encourage or discourage my child from wanting to communicate with me?” Watch the results you get and learn from them. If your child begins to open up to you, you are on the right path. If your child continues to be closed or withholds information, consider trying other options. Talk with other parents, take a parenting class which addresses your child’s developmental stage, and read articles concerning communication with children. Be courageous in practicing new ways of communicating with your child that might allow for more openness between the two of you.

7. Just listen.

Sometimes as parents we feel over-responsible for raising “perfect” children. We feel it is our job to make them feel better, fix, advise, and always have the right answers. It is often best for us to close our mouths and open our ears and our hearts. Simply, listening intently can be one of the most empowering things we can do for our children. By listening intently, I mean focusing 100% attention on what your child is communicating without letting your mind wander to something else you might think is important at the moment. It is obvious you can’t do this every time your child wants to talk with you.

However, if you do this several times a day, your child will feel important and loved by you in a matter of minutes!!

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