

Improving Your Family Communication

Your family can provide a safe environment for family members to share feelings, thoughts, frustrations, fears, hopes and dreams. What's the single-best thing you can do to improve family communication? Make a daily effort to talk with each family member alone and together as a family. Below are additional ideas that can help you improve family communication:

Become a better listener. Listening is as important as talking. When you listen well to family members, you encourage them to talk about what is most important to them. Sometimes a person can find a solution to a problem or discover the source of stress just by talking. For more effective listening you should:

- *Listen to the whole story.* Give your family member the opportunity to communicate their thoughts, feelings, needs or desires without interrupting. Listen for understanding. Put aside your opinions, thoughts or conclusions until after you've heard what they have to say.
- *Clarify meaning.* Guard against assuming that you know what your family member means or feels by asking them questions to assure your understanding. Ask questions such as, "Do you mean _____?" or "I understood you to say _____."

Improve your talking skills. Negative talking skills can stifle communication. To express yourself more effectively you should:

- *Learn to speak without attacking or blaming.* Avoid starting a sentence with "you." It sounds like an accusation or an invitation to fight (which it often is). Instead, describe how a behavior or situation affects you. Say "I think..."or, "I want..."or, "I feel..." For example, "I am upset because you two are fighting a lot these days. I want to have a more pleasant atmosphere in the house."
- *Describe your feelings.* Don't assume that other family members know your needs, feelings and opinions without you telling them. To express yourself clearly use "feeling" words like "sad," "happy," "excited," "angry," "worried," etc.

Additional ideas that may work well for your family:

- Have a regular place and time for all family communication.
- Spend time together as a family - trips, outings, vacations, religious or family events.
- Be honest about your concerns and wishes.
- With teenagers, discuss an issue. Explain your views. Ask them theirs.
- Accept each of your children as an individual.
- Be supportive. Allow your child to make mistakes and encourage them to do their own problem solving. Work together to determine how a situation could have been better handled.
- Be aware of non-verbal communication too. Your family knows you well and will believe what your face, tone of voice and posture say more quickly than your words.

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