

How to talk so kids will listen...



Keys to good communication:

1. Use words they understand
2. Get to their level – look them in the eyes
3. Say his/her name before speaking a question or command
4. Use positive language
5. Ask the child to tell you what he/she heard
6. Encourage questions
7. Avoid asking “why”
8. Let them trust you



The nitty-gritty:

1. Use words they understand – Grown-ups use grown up words but sometimes kids do not understand what we are saying. Always call something by its appropriate name and explain anything that cannot be changed to a different “kid-friendly” word.
2. Get to their level – look them in the eyes – Making eye contact gives us a lot of information about how the message is being received. It also shows respect for that person. Your attention is 100% on them.
3. Say his/her name before speaking a question or command – Children who are engaged in an activity may not hear you make a statement or ask a question. This isn’t because they don’t want to listen, it’s just that their mind is busy concentrating on something else. Stating the person’s name allows the brain to trigger the listening response and gets them to acknowledge that you have their attention.
4. Use positive language – There are a couple meanings here. First, be kind when providing feedback, instructions, or consequences. Say what you mean, mean what you say, and don’t say it mean. The next idea about positive language is that we too often tell children what we don’t want them to do....”don’t run”, “stop talking”, “Don’t touch that”. Instead, use language that lets them know exactly how you want them to behave....”Please walk”, “Please be quiet”, “Keep your hands to yourself, please”. When we tell them what they shouldn’t be doing, it may stop the behavior but they may not know what they should do instead. Finally, when providing feedback, make a positive sandwich. “Taking something that doesn’t belong to you is not okay. You are a good friend who knows right from wrong. I want to hear about what happened and what will be different in the future.”
5. Ask the child to tell you what he/she heard – When communicating, there are reception errors (by the listener) and delivery errors (by the talker). Just because the child doesn’t understand you doesn’t mean it is their problem. You may have delivered it in a way that isn’t clear.

Always ask the child to tell you what they heard you say....Then you can get an idea of what their mind processed and make adjustments accordingly. Asking a child “do you understand?” will get you an answer, but it may not be accurate.

6. Encourage questions – Children are often curious about what they are doing and what you are asking them to do. “Because I said so” is an easy answer but not very respectful. Children learn about the world by their experiences. So you may tell them to make their bed. The child may ask “what is the point of making my bed if I’m just going to get in it again?” Your answer sets the stage for how they respect their belongs, control their environment, and follow instructions even when we think the task is silly.
7. Avoid asking “why” – There is typically only one answer you will ever get when you ask a child this question.... A shoulder shrug and/or “I don’t know.” And they truly may not. Ask open ended questions that generate some discussion about the event. “Tell me what happened.” “What can you do differently next time?”
8. Let them trust you – Never force a child to talk with someone. You may present the opportunity, but until they feel safe, it isn’t going to be a good experience. We can teach children polite niceties “Good morning”, “Hello”, “Excuse me” that allow them to demonstrate kindness and respect but does not require conversation.