

Heart Heart **PARENTS**

Tips for Better Tween Communication

If you want tweens to hear you and what you counsel, you must make the investment in time and energy to listen to them.

There are two types of listening. Passive listening and active listening.

Active listening: Restatement of last word or phrase - Passive listening is simply hearing what your tween has to say without a response from you as the parent. Active listening involves reflecting back the feeling of what your child is communicating to you, like a type of conversational mirror. Tweens feel valued when adults actively listened to them.

When there is a natural pause in her conversation with me, I simply repeat the last few words of her last sentence. It may feel mechanical at first but it shows your tween that you are really listening to them and are trying to understand their meaning. Active listening also sends the message that you are interested in learning more.

Re-state or rephrase again to check meaning. Don't assume understanding. Check it out. This step requires a little bravery because I risk rejection and if she is particularly hormonal or in a rebellious or angry mood, it can hurt. Being willing to check out my interpretation with Grace requires vulnerability. Over the years, I've seen her respond by opening up more.

Summarize - When the conversation starts winding down, summarize the essence of the conversation to confirm meaning and build trust. This may be the hardest part of active listening but with practice skills grow.

Here is sample conversation that put the steps together.

*Mom: "Tell me about Amy?" - **Conversation starter with an open ended question***

Ashley: "She's okay but she's always with her new boyfriend Matt now. (Grace rolls her eyes.) He's cool but they are just so in to each other."

*Mom: "So, they are really into each other?" - **Active listening***

Ashley: "Yeah, I feel like the third wheel on a lopsided tricycle. It sort of makes me mad."

*Mom: "You are angry because you feel left out?" - **Confirmation of meaning***

Ashley: “Yes, especially at lunch.”

Pause in the conversation. Mom resists the temptation to fill it with words.

Ashley: “I guess I could go eat at Abbie and Maddy’s table.

Mom: You feel left out because of how Amy and Matt relate to each other, especially at lunch. But you are willing to eat with other friends. – **Summarizing**

Ashley: Yes, but I really miss Amy.

Mom: I know you miss your private time with Amy but I am really proud of you for trying new things. - **Affirmation**

Ashley: Thanks Mom.

David Brashear, a licensed clinical social worker who works with tweens and parents states that parents who take the time to learn and practice these skills, reap rewards beyond measure. He shares that parent-tween bonds strengthen, joint problem solving occurs more readily and risky teen behavior improves when parents practice these skills.

A multitude of studies have shown that teens still view their parents as their primary role models. Talking to your kids about school, healthy habits, peer pressure, sex, drugs, rock and roll as well as making positive choices is a lot to tackle during the tween years. The simple practice of developing discussions with open ended questions, active listening and I-messages can be the key to the kind of communication that keeps our children safe. And isn’t that what every parent wants?

Parenting Exercise: Practice active listening to your tween at least once a day until it becomes natural. Share your results with us!

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