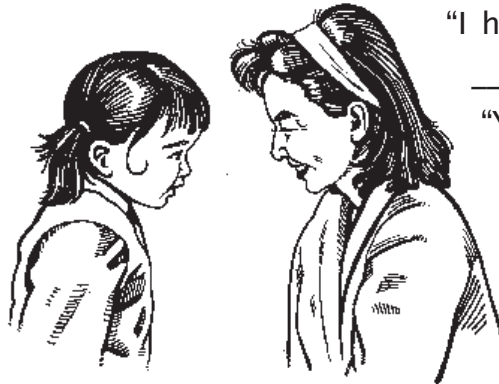


Communicating with Children

Children develop a sense of their own self-worth and of how you feel about them from how you communicate with them. This tool offers information and ideas that may help foster communication between you and your child.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN

- Listen with your feelings and your eyes, not just your ears. Watch for and respond to your child's attempts to communicate.
- Your child will often express himself indirectly, especially when he is experiencing strong emotions. His actions usually reflect feelings more effectively than words (e.g., he may slink away when ashamed or jump up and down when proud).
- The best listening is silent listening. Keep your eyes on your child, and do not engage in other activities while you are listening.
- During early childhood, children often express themselves through stories about other people, imaginary friends, or animals who do things that the children would like to do or are afraid of or feel guilty about doing.
- If you sense that your child is feeling a certain emotion, she probably is. Ask her about it, or guess, and request feedback.
- Rephrase what your child is saying to reflect both its content and its feelings without adding your own interpretation. Say something like,



"I hear you saying _____."

"You seem to feel _____."

Be aware that your posture and tone of voice can affect how your child communicates with you. You may need to help your child put

words to the feelings that he is expressing through body language or actions. Pausing before immediately suggesting solutions or giving directives allows your child a chance to solve the problem on his own.

- When listening to your child, try not to let your own emotions show to an extent that may limit your child's sense of being free to express herself. Be nonjudgmental about your child's expression of feelings, even when limits for her actions are needed.

TALKING TO CHILDREN

- Keep praise, instructions, and corrections short, simple, and specific, even for very verbal children. This increases the chances that your child will get the message rather than get distracted.

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- Give praise or thanks for small, specific actions, rather than making generalizations that your child may not believe (e.g., “You combed your hair so well!” rather than, “You’re the best girl in the world!”).
 - Ask a follow-up question to show you are really interested.
 - Aim for praise to outnumber correction by 10 to 1.
 - Provide comments to your child frequently to let him know you are thinking about him.
 - Use plenty of nonverbal praise such as touches, hugs, winks, pats, or stickers.
 - Praise your child’s actions to other adults when she can hear you to reinforce its impact.
 - Correct your child in private when possible, especially away from peers or siblings.
- Praise your child for not misbehaving in a way he might have considered (e.g., “I am proud of you for staying calm,” “Thank you for not touching the plates at the store.”).
 - Avoid diminishing praise by adding a complaint or criticism to it (e.g., “Thanks for cleaning up your room! Why don’t you do this every time I ask?”).
 - Use statements that begin with “I” to show your own reaction and avoid being discounted (e.g., “I really like the way you were sharing your crayons with your sister.”).
 - Share your own feelings both as a model and to let your child know she is not the cause of all your upsets.
 - As your child gets older, work toward having her assess her own performance (e.g., “What do you think of your drawing?”).

Tips for Parenting the Anxious Child

Does your child:

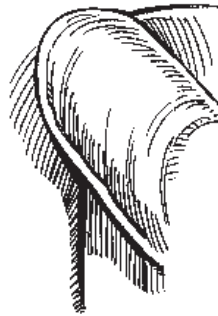
- Worry or feel frightened excessively or without a good reason?
- Have many concerns about academic or social performance?
- Need an excessive amount of reassurance?
- Have physical complaints, such as headaches or stomach-aches, when feeling stressed?
- Become embarrassed easily?
- Have difficulty relaxing in groups?



At certain ages all children experience fears. Some children may have more difficulty with anxiety than others. The following suggestions may be useful in addressing your child's anxieties or fears:

- Encourage and reward independent activities.
- Your child may experience physical symptoms when he is stressed; don't overreact to them.
- To help your young child conquer her own fear, ask her to teach a doll or a stuffed animal how to be more confident.
- Explain new situations in advance in a simple, friendly manner. Try role playing to prepare for upcoming situations.
- Help with bedtime fears by buying your child a new and specific stuffed animal, a "special companion," which can help him feel less scared at bedtime.

- Establish clear and regular morning and bedtime routines, and stick with them. Let your child use a night light, if it helps her feel less scared. Children feel more secure with a well-structured and predictable, but not overly rigid, daily routine.
- Assess whether television or video game violence may be contributing to your child's fears. Television and video game violence can make your child scared even if he wants to watch it and says that it does not bother him. For more information on television and video game violence and how it affects children, read Cantor J. 1998. *Mommy, I'm Scared: How TV and Movies Frighten Children and What We Can Do to Protect Them*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.
- Be aware that apparent daydreaming and concentration problems at school may be caused by your child's preoccupation with fears and anxiety.
- Ask a librarian to help you choose books to read to your child that address specific fearsome situations.
- Don't get involved in lengthy discussions about fears. Reassure your child that you are doing all you can to keep anything bad from happening. Role play upcoming situations that are likely to cause your child anxiety.
- Be open about and explain stresses on the family (e.g., a parent out of work, an



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impending move, a sibling experiencing serious problems) to your child in simple terms, and reassure her that the adults in the family will take care of things.

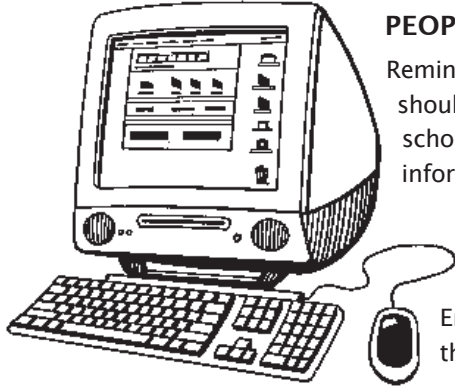
Children are sensitive to adult anxiety and may exaggerate situations that are not explained to them.

- Try to avoid extremes (e.g., being too rigid, too permissive, or overprotective).
- Be honest and objective about family problems that might make your child fearful. If the problems are too complex to address within the family (e.g., parental abuse of alcohol, abusive behavior, marital problems or parental illness [mental or physical]), seek counseling.
- Be aware that the object or situation your child identifies as the cause of her fears may be a substitute for something she is

hesitant to express (e.g., fear of “monsters” may really be fear of a person; fear of “the dark” may really be fear of the arguing she hears from another room). Consider whether there are “family secrets” your child may be afraid of or not allowed to discuss openly. Seek counseling if you find it too difficult to communicate with your child about her fears.

- Suggest that your child write a story or draw a picture of scary things, and look for clues to help you understand his fears better. An older child might write a letter or keep a journal.
- Preoccupation with death or dying or other morbid subjects may be a sign of depression. If your child is overly concerned with these things, have him evaluated by a health professional.

Safety Tips for Surfing the Internet



PEOPLE YOUR CHILD MEETS ON THE INTERNET ARE STRANGERS

Remind your child that people she meets on the Internet are strangers. Just as she should not give out her address, her telephone number, her name, the location of her school, or any other information to a stranger, she should not give out personal information to people she meets on the Internet.

TALK WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT WHAT HE SEES AND DOES ON THE INTERNET

Encourage your child to talk to you right away about anything on the Internet that makes him feel uncomfortable.

ASK YOUR CHILD ABOUT THE PEOPLE SHE MEETS ON THE INTERNET

Make sure that your child talks to you directly about anyone she has met on the Internet who wants to meet her in person.

MEETING “FRIENDS” FROM THE INTERNET IN PERSON REQUIRES ADULT SUPERVISION

Establish a firm rule that your child may not go to meet someone he met on the Internet unless a parent or other responsible adult goes with him.

E-MAILING PERSONAL INFORMATION SHOULD BE DONE ONLY WITH PERMISSION

Explain to your child that it is not safe to e-mail pictures of herself or any other personal information without first checking with you. Let her know that just as it is important that you know who her friends are and what she does with her friends, it is important that she talks with you before beginning an e-mail friendship with a new person.

HAVE FREQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT CONVERSATIONS AND MESSAGES HE RECEIVES THROUGH THE INTERNET

Encourage your child to talk to you about any messages that are mean or make him feel uncomfortable. Reassure your child that he is not to blame if he gets a message of that kind. Urge him to confide in you, reminding him that you are on his team.

SET CLEAR HOUSE RULES ABOUT INTERNET USE

As with all media, set limits on Internet use. Be clear about your rules and expectations, and let your child know that you want her to enjoy the Internet for the wonderful resource it is. Emphasize that the guidelines you have set up will enable her to enjoy the Internet safely.

Twenty Free Ways to Love Your Child



1. Set aside time just to talk with your child. No phones, no TV, just talk. Find out what happened during your child's day.
2. In good weather, sit outside with your child and watch the world go by, even if it's only for 10 minutes.
3. Make family routines and traditions. Try to share at least one meal as a family every day. If weekdays are impossible, then every weekend.
4. Talk to your child about school and friends.
5. Tell your child you love her.
6. Tell her again.
7. Go to the park. Walk around; swing on the swings.
8. Pay attention to what your child is doing. Things that seem mundane to parents can be very important to children. Share your child's little victories.
9. Let your child help with what you are doing.
10. Show interest in your child's thoughts and feelings so he will be more willing to come to you with his problems and concerns.
11. Respect your child's thoughts and feelings. Her feelings are as real to her as yours are to you.
12. Tell your child you love him.
13. Tell him again.
14. Look at your child when you talk together. If she sees you reading a newspaper or watching TV while she is talking, she may believe that what she is saying is unimportant to you.
15. Catch your child being good, and praise him.
16. Make a bedtime routine that you try to stick to every night. Children like routines, and it can be a great time for sharing the day's events.
17. Read a story together.
18. Make something with your child. Make brownies or a birdhouse.
19. Tell your child you love her. Hug her.
20. Tell her again. Hug her again.

Source: Adapted, with permission, from The Crusade Against Child Abuse. 20 Free Ways to Love Your Child. Charlotte, NC: The Crusade Against Child Abuse. A project of Thompson Children's Home. Phone: (704) 536-0375.

Common Signs of Depression in Children and Adolescents



BEHAVIOR CHANGES

Instead of looking sad, as adults do, children often become aggressive or prone to angry outbursts.

SLEEP CHANGES

Although an increase or decrease in sleep can occur with depression at any age, children and younger adolescents may sleep too much, refusing to get out of bed. Adults and older adolescents are more apt to have trouble sleeping.

APPETITE CHANGES

Although an increase or decrease in appetite can occur with depression at any age, older adolescents tend to lose weight, whereas children and younger adolescents may gain weight.

IRREGULAR BOWEL MOVEMENTS

Children old enough to control their bowels may withhold or have “accidents.”

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Children and adolescents may complain of stomachaches, headaches, and more. They may show signs of decreased energy or fatigue.

SCHOOL PROBLEMS

Children’s and adolescents’ interest or performance in school may take a nosedive. Ability to concentrate may be diminished. Grades may drop; discipline problems may start.

EXTENDED BAD REACTIONS TO CRISES

Children and adolescents usually adapt to changes such as a new school in several weeks. Adapting to a death or parental divorce may take a year.

LOSS OF INTEREST IN OLD PLEASURES

Activities that made children and adolescents happy may no longer do so.

CHANGE OF FRIENDS

Children and adolescents may withdraw socially or switch their allegiance to friends whom parents see as less desirable.

EXPRESSIONS OF HOPELESSNESS OR FEELINGS OF WORTHLESSNESS

RECURRENT THOUGHTS OF DEATH AND SUICIDAL THOUGHTS