

# The Art and Importance of Listening

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*Communicating with Children and Teens (and anyone else, for that matter)*

## **Availability**

Be flexible! Take advantage of bedtime, driving in the car, running errands. Look for spontaneous opportunities to listen. Offer to drive to/from a party or event and listen. Understand eye contact is not always necessary. If you cannot stop to give your child attention at that time, offer an alternative. Tell her exactly when you can pay full attention and follow through.



## **Quantity versus Quality**

Quality is important. But quantity counts, too.

## **Mind Your Body Language**

If you are telling a child/teen you have time to listen, show it. Sit down, get to eye level, close the door, turn off the cell phone, turn off the tv. Or you can go for a walk together.

## **Curb the Interruptions**

The key to getting a teen to open up is to say very little. Respect silences. Kids don't process as fast as adults. Filling in silences can derail their train of thought.

## **Active Listening**

Repeat in your words what you heard her say. This will clarify the communication. Let her know you "get her" or at least that you're trying to understand where she's coming from. Ask her to explain what you don't get. Avoid sarcasm. It's the fastest way to kill a conversation with a teenager.

## **Reaching Their Own Conclusions**

Ask your child: How can I be most helpful to you? How are you thinking of handling this? How would you feel? What else could you do? This builds her problem-solving skills which will last a lifetime.

## **Responding (or not): Be Careful about Offering Advice**

Sometimes, they just need a sounding board. If they want your opinion or advice, they'll ask you directly. Stay calm and keep your ego out of it. They will often recognize mistakes on their own as they think out loud.

## **Touch: the Ultimate Sign of Safety**

Don't be afraid to touch your daughter -- a light touch on the shoulder when they are on the computer or on an arm when they are talking with you. Offer and ask for hugs, they make everyone feel better. Be sure to tell your teen that you love them and are glad they are part of your life (even if they roll their eyes at you: they want and need to hear it).