



Listening: The Key to Successful Communication by Sue Blaney

If you had to grade the communication in your house, what grade would you give it? Do you feel that your family hears what you have to say? Do you do a good job listening to your teenager? Are you able to talk out the problems you face together? Give a grade to the communication in your home as you see it, and then ask your teenager how he or she would grade the communication in your house. Compare the grades.

The sad fact is parents usually think they are doing a good job, but their teens often don't feel that way. There are common mistakes that parents make in communicating with teenagers and **not listening** tops the list. I'll share a few simple things you can do that will help improve your listening and even improve your relationship.

Talk less, listen more - This sounds basic, doesn't it? Actually, this requires your constant attention and you may have to break some bad habits. Let's keep this goal in mind; by the time your teenager graduates from high school you want him/her to be independent and responsible, right? You are trying to guide your teen to make good choices. If you make a practice of listening to what your teen has to say, then you'll know about his/her values, interests and the situations he/she faces. In order to provide helpful guidance you must listen regularly. Remember this rule - you have two ears and one mouth; try to listen twice as much as you talk.

The quality of your listening matters - Do you ever catch yourself thinking of what to say while your teen is speaking to you? Not only can this lead to misunderstandings, but it also gives a message that what he/she is saying isn't very important. It is much better to tune in completely to what your teen is saying by focusing not just on the words, but on the feelings that he/she is expressing. This is called deep listening; this respectful listening shows that you care, and it helps make sure you really hear what your teen is telling you.

Tune into your body language - People communicate by using words, tone of voice and body language. This may surprise you, but you communicate most through your body language. Notice how you position yourself when you are listening to your teen. It's helpful to give him/her your complete attention by making eye contact; make sure your body is open and relaxed. When it's a really important discussion, it's helpful to sit down together so there are no other distractions.

As parents you can benefit by fine-tuning your listening skills, and you are likely to find that this will positively influence your relationship with your teen.