

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk

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Get your kids' cooperation...without arguing. Morning hassles and bedtime battles disappear when you apply the communication techniques these experts have been teaching parents nationwide. Even if you've felt you had no other alternative than to lecture or criticize, you'll be able to reduce the wear and tear on yourself and your family with this practical program. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish -- once frustrated mothers themselves -- use real-life situations to show how you can respect and respond to your child's feelings and satisfy your own needs.

You'll learn to:

- Avoid turning simple conversations into arguments
- Instruct rather than criticize when correcting your child
- Choose effective alternatives to punishment
- Show your child how to make amends
- Allow him to experience the direct consequences of his actions

See immediate changes in your relationship with your children -- changes that will mean the difference between bad feelings and good ones; between fighting and loving.

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish are #1 New York Times bestselling and award-winning authors whose books have sold more than three million copies and have been translated into over thirty languages. *How to Talk So Kids Can Learn-At Home and in School*, was cited by *Child Magazine* as the "best book of the year for excellence in family issues in education." The authors' group workshop programs and videos produced by PBS are currently being used by parent and teacher groups around the world. They currently reside in Long Island, New York and each is the parent of three children. *Helping Children Deal with Their Feelings*

PART I

I was a wonderful parent before I had children. I was an expert on why everyone else was having problems with theirs. Then I had three of my own.

Living with real children can be humbling. Every morning I would tell myself, "Today is going to be different," and every morning was a variation of the one before: "You gave her more than me!" . . . "That's the pink cup. I want the blue cup." . . . "This oatmeal looks like throw-up." . . . "He punched me." . . . "I never touched him!" . . . "I won't go to my room. You're not the boss over me!"

They finally wore me down. And though it was the last thing I ever dreamed I'd be doing, I joined a parent group. The group met at a local child-guidance center and was led by a young psychologist, Dr. Haim Ginott.

The meeting was intriguing. The subject was "children's feelings," and the two hours sped by. I came home with a head spinning with new thoughts and a notebook full of undigested ideas:

Direct connection between how kids feel and how they behave.

When kids feel right, they'll behave right.

How do we help them to feel right?

By accepting their feelings!

Problem-Parents don't usually accept their children's feelings. For example:

"You don't really feel that way."

"You're just saying that because you're tired."

"There's no reason to be so upset."

Steady denial of feelings can confuse and enrage kids. Also teaches them not to know what their feelings are-not to trust them.

After the session I remember thinking, "Maybe other parents do that. I don't." Then I started listening to myself. Here are some sample conversations from my home-just from a single day.

CHILD:Mommy, I'm tired.ME:You couldn't be tired. You just napped.CHILD:(louder) But I'm tired.ME:You're not tired. You're just a little sleepy. Let's get dressed.CHILD:(wailing) No, I'm tired!CHILD:Mommy, it's hot in here.ME:It's cold. Keep your sweater on.CHILD:No, I'm hot.ME:I said, "Keep your sweater on!"CHILD:No, I'm hot.CHILD:That TV show was boring.ME:No, it wasn't. It was very interesting.CHILD:It was stupid.ME:It was educational.CHILD:It stunk.ME:Don't talk that way!

Can you see what was happening? Not only were all our conversations turning into

arguments, I was also telling my children over and over again not to trust their own perceptions but to rely on mine instead.

Once I was aware of what I was doing, I was determined to change. But I wasn't sure how to go about it. What finally helped me most was actually putting myself in my children's shoes. I asked myself, "Suppose I were a child who was tired, or hot or bored? And suppose I wanted that all-important grown-up in my life to know what I was feeling . . . ?"

Over the next weeks I tried to tune in to what I thought my children might be experiencing, and when I did, my words seemed to follow naturally. I wasn't just using a technique. I really meant it when I said, "So you're still feeling tired-even though you just napped." Or "I'm cold, but for you it's hot in here." Or "I can see you didn't care much for that show." After all, we were two separate people, capable of having two different sets of feelings. Neither of us was right or wrong. We each felt what we felt.

For a while, my new skill was a big help. There was a noticeable reduction in the number of arguments between the children and me. Then one day my daughter announced, "I hate Grandma," and it was my mother she was talking about. I never hesitated for a second. "That is a terrible thing to say," I snapped. "You know you don't mean it. I don't ever want to hear that coming out of your mouth again."

That little exchange taught me something else about myself. I could be very accepting about most of the feelings the children had, but let one of them tell me something that made me angry or anxious and I'd instantly revert to my old way.

I've since learned that my reaction was not that unusual. On the following page you'll find examples of other statements children make that often lead to an automatic denial from their parents. Please read each statement and jot down what you think a parent might say if he were denying his child's feelings.

I. CHILD: I don't like the new baby.

PARENT: (denying the feeling)

II. CHILD: I had a dumb birthday party. (After you went "all out" to make it a wonderful day.)

PARENT: (denying the feeling)

III. CHILD: I'm not wearing this stupid retainer anymore. It hurts. I don't care what the orthodontist says!

PARENT: (denying the feeling)

IV. CHILD: I hate that new coach! Just because I was one minute late he kicked me off the team.

PARENT: (denying the feeling)

Did you find yourself writing things like:

"That's not so. I know in your heart you really love the baby."

"What are you talking about? You had a wonderful party-ice cream, birthday cake, balloons. Well, that's the last party you'll ever have!"

"Your retainer can't hurt that much. After all the money we've invested in your mouth, you'll wear that thing whether you like it or not!"

"You have no right to be mad at the coach. It's your fault. You should have been on time."

Somehow this kind of talk comes easily to many of us. But how do children feel when they hear it? In order to get a sense of what it's like to have one's feelings dismissed, try the following exercise:

Imagine that you're at work. Your employer asks you to do an extra job for him. He wants it ready by the end of the day. You mean to take care of it immediately, but because of a series of emergencies that come up you completely forget. Things are so hectic, you barely have time for your own lunch.

As you and a few coworkers are getting ready to go home, your boss comes over to you and asks for the finished piece of work. Quickly you try to explain how unusually busy you were today.

He interrupts you. In a loud, angry voice he shouts, "I'm not interested in your excuses! What the hell do you think I'm paying you for—to sit around all day on your butt?" As you open your mouth to speak, he says, "Save it," and walks off to the elevator.

Your coworkers pretend not to have heard. You finish gathering your things and leave the office. On the way home you meet a friend. You're still so upset that you find yourself telling him or her what had just taken place.

Your friend tries to "help" you in eight different ways. As you read each response, tune in to your immediate "gut" reaction and then write it down. (There are no right or wrong reactions. Whatever you feel is right for you.)

I. Denial of Feelings: "There's no reason to be so upset. It's foolish to feel that way. You're probably just tired and blowing the whole thing out of proportion. It can't be as bad as you make it out to be. Come on, smile . . . You look so nice when you smile."

Your reaction:

II. The Philosophical Response: "Look, life is like that. Things don't always turn out the way

we want. You have to learn to take things in stride. In this world, nothing is perfect."

Your reaction:

III. Advice: "You know what I think you should do? Tomorrow morning go straight to your boss's office and say, 'Look, I was wrong.' Then sit right down and finish that piece of work you neglected today. Don't get trapped by those little emergencies that come up. And if you're smart and you want to keep that job of yours, you'll make sure nothing like that ever happens again."

Your reaction:

IV. Questions: "What exactly were those emergencies you had that would cause you to forget a special request from your boss?"

"Didn't you realize he'd be angry if you didn't get to it immediately?"

"Has this ever happened before?"

"Why didn't you follow him when he left the room and try to explain again?"

Your reaction:

V. Defense of the Other Person: "I can understand your boss's reaction. He's probably under terrible pressure. You're lucky he doesn't lose his temper more often."

Your reaction:

VI. Pity: "Oh, you poor thing. That is terrible! I feel so sorry for you, I could just cry."

Your reaction:

VII. Amateur Psychoanalysis: "Has it ever occurred to you that the real reason you're so upset by this is because your employer represents a father figure in your life? As a child you probably worried about displeasing your father, and when your boss scolded you it brought back your early fears of rejection. Isn't that true?"

Your reaction:

VIII. An Empathic Response (an attempt to tune into the feelings of another): "Boy, that sounds like a rough experience. To be subjected to an attack like that in front of other people, especially after having been under so much pressure, must have been pretty hard to take!"

Your reaction:

You've just been exploring your own reactions to some fairly typical ways that people talk. Now I'd like to share with you some of my personal reactions. When I'm upset or hurting, the last thing I want to hear is advice, philosophy, psychology, or the other fellow's point of view. That kind of talk makes me only feel worse than before. Pity leaves me feeling pitiful; questions put me on the defensive; and most infuriating of all is to hear that I have no reason to feel what I'm feeling. My overriding reaction to most of these responses is "Oh, forget it. . . . What's the point of going on?"

But let someone really listen, let someone acknowledge my inner pain and give me a chance to talk more about what's troubling me, and I begin to feel less upset, less confused, more able to cope with my feelings and my problem.

I might even say to myself, "My boss is usually fair. . . . I suppose I should have taken care of that report immediately. . . . But I still can't overlook what he did. . . . Well, I'll go in early tomorrow and write that report first thing in the morning. . . . But when I bring it to his office I'll let him know how upsetting it was for me to be spoken to in that way. . . . And I'll also let him know that, from now on, if he has any criticism I would appreciate being told privately."

The process is no different for our children. They too can help themselves if they have a listening ear and an empathic response. But the language of empathy does not come naturally to us. It's not part of our "mother tongue." Most of us grew up having our feelings denied. To become fluent in this new language of acceptance, we have to learn and practice its methods. Here are some ways to help children deal with their feelings.

TO HELP WITH FEELINGS

1. Listen with full attention.
2. Acknowledge their feelings with a word-"Oh" . . . "Mmm" . . . "I see."
3. Give their feelings a name.
4. Give them their wishes in fantasy.

On the next few pages you'll see the contrast between these methods and the ways that people usually respond to a child who is in distress.

🔗 1980 Adele Faber

Other Books

Hangover Wisdom, 100 Thoughts on How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk , from the Morning After. In this book, we have hand-picked the most sophisticated, unanticipated, absorbing (if not at times crackpot!), original and musing book reviews of "How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk." Don't say we didn't warn you: these reviews are known to shock with their unconventionality or intimacy. Some may be startled by their biting sincerity; others may be spellbound by their unbridled flights of fantasy. Don't buy this book if: 1. You don't have nerves of steel. 2. You expect to get pregnant in the next five minutes. 3. You've heard it all.

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