

Communication Skills Building: A Tip Sheet for Parents

Communicating, Listening, & Asking the Right Questions

- **Talk WITH her, not TO her.** Ask your daughter what she thinks about a certain situation to understand her point of view. Talk with her about the risks and consequences she faces for certain decisions and actions.
- **Help your daughter out.** Listen to the difficulties she is facing and how they make her feel. Peer pressure can make the preteen years especially challenging. Your daughter will need a great deal of support in resisting the urge to be like everyone else.
- **Ask the right questions.** Don't jump to conclusions. Get the complete story by asking open-ended questions instead of "yes/no" questions. This allows your daughter to feel like "her side" is being heard. It also encourages communication even when she is faced with difficult situations. She can explain herself, and you can collect more information to take appropriate action.

Self-Image & Boys

- **Spend one-on-one time with your daughter.** Girls mature at different ages, and as they start to experience body changes personally or through their friends, many questions arise. Talk with your daughter about what types of changes to expect and how these changes happen at different ages for each girl. This will improve her understanding and self-esteem.
- **Be her guide.** Interest in and feelings for boys also start at different ages for each girl, but it's usually around the preteen years. Talk with your daughter about how boys and girls think differently, especially when there is a difference in age. Begin talking about dating.

Time Management & Organizational Skills

- **Teach your daughter time-management skills.** Teach her to create the habit of always putting things in one specific place so they're easy to find and to plan activities far enough in advance. Discuss her goals and the time it takes her to complete different chores and tasks. Help her be realistic about what she can

accomplish in that timeframe. This may help her get more things done, do better in school, avoid falling behind, and feel less stressed.

- **Set an example.** Our kids watch us closely. They often mimic what we do, including our bad habits. Be open with your daughter when you are trying to correct a bad habit. Don't worry about being a perfect parent. Your kids already know you're not. When they see you working toward correcting something, they know they can change as well. If every member of the family learns to better manage his or her time and be more organized, everyone will feel less stressed, and family conflicts will be avoided.
- **Set schedules.** Planning specific times to watch TV, turn off lights, and go to bed can help improve time-management skills for all family members.

Discipline & Dating

- **Set clear expectations.** Be clear when setting house rules. Encourage your daughter to help set the rules. Try to find some agreement between both points of view. Instead of saying no without explanations, give reasons for your decisions. The consequences for breaking rules need to be clear.
- **Avoid playing "good cop/bad cop."** Our parenting styles are often informed by how we were raised. If you come from a really strict background, you might adopt that same approach with your daughter. On the other hand, sometimes people reject how they were raised and take a totally different approach (e.g., being more flexible or lenient). If you and your partner have differing styles, you must communicate how you are going to parent your child consistently through the differences. No one wants to always be the "bad cop" in a child's life, and being the "good cop" doesn't always bring about the results you want. Parents must strike a balance. Working together can help develop a realistic set of expectations for your daughter and prevent her from trying to manipulate or "divide and conquer." A unified voice is the key to consistency. Remember that YOU are the parents and that the final decision is yours.



Appropriate Dress & Internet Dangers

- **Discuss what's appropriate; don't just say no.** As tweens begin to develop their unique personalities, clothing can play a big role. Fashion and trends can become a daily struggle, because you might feel certain clothes she sees some of her friends wearing are inappropriate. Saying no without talking to her about it may lead her to dress in those clothes behind your back. Instead, explain why she cannot wear certain things, and look for a compromise. Try checking out fashion magazines together for ideas. This helps you get a better understanding of how your daughter sees herself and how she wants others to see her.
- **Set Internet rules and schedules.** The Internet allows easy access to information both educational and inappropriate. It can also present potential dangers such as giving out private information (including pictures) without one's consent, exposure to sexual predators and identity theft (documents, bank accounts, credit cards), and misuse of time. Set rules for Internet use to better manage your daughter's online activities. You can also set schedules and monitor the use of other electronic devices, such as cell phones.

Peer Pressure (Smoking, Drugs, & Alcohol)

- **Talk about selected personal experiences with your daughter.** Be sincere and honest. Use real examples with positive and desired outcomes to reinforce the point you are making.
- **Take the time to know your daughter's friends.** This will help you to understand her point of view and better anticipate changes in her behavior.
- **Teach your daughter what her limits are and how to say no when necessary.** Talk to her about the importance of respecting others and being respected.
- **Let your daughter know she can come to you with questions.** Remember to stay open-minded and provide advice rather than judging or reacting negatively.

Positive Reinforcement

- **Provide support.** Our kids don't always get it right on the first try. Support your daughter where you can when she missteps, and provide tools that might help her do better the next time.
- **Provide compliments.** Whether they admit to it or not, your children like to receive your praise and approval. Compliment your daughter when she is doing something that you like or that makes you proud. This not only helps to boost her self-image but also encourages her to stay on the right track.

Be Good to Yourself

- **Breathe.** Kids will often present us with unexpected behaviors and challenges. Keep a cool head, resist using physical punishment, and make your decisions with as much clarity as possible.
- **Seek out parent support groups.** Sometimes we all need a little help in navigating through parenthood and the stress that it can bring. It can be useful to seek out support groups and other parents who can act as a "sounding board" or who may be facing similar situations. It helps to know that you aren't alone. You can learn from other parents' experiences and find resources that offer the support you need.

Some Helpful Resources

- www.womenshealth.gov
- www.girlshealth.gov

There is a button for parents or caregivers on the home page of www.girlshealth.gov. Click on the button to find useful information about parenting your daughter. Call the OWH Helpline at 800-994-9662.