

Let's be Honest

*Communication in Families that keep kids
healthy*


Parental Workshop - 12 February 2011

Our Children

- ▶ Children are open and honest until they are taught to be otherwise
- ▶ Honest communication is important for children.

Feeling Before Reasoning

- ▶ "Honest" communication means making your words congruent with your feelings. Realize that children "feel" out situations before they are able to "reason" through them.
- ▶ That's why:

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- ▶ If you are not completely honest, children feel it.
 - ▶ If you try to smooth things over, they know it.
 - ▶ If you speak in hushed tones, they wonder what's wrong.
 - ▶ If you gossip, they assume you are hiding something.
 - ▶ If your words don't match your facial expression, children feel the lack of congruence. As a result, they may become unsure of what you say and choose to not listen. Or they may think they understand when they really don't.

How child translates parents talk

- ▶ All young children translate every word said by the adults into underlying feelings.
- ▶ Parents say, "She eats like a bird," Child translates it into, "I peck at my food. Something's wrong."
- ▶ Parents Say, "The wind will blow her away," Child hears, "I'm too skinny."
- ▶ If they said, "She has Aunt Edna's nose, I translated it as, "My nose is big and ugly." That's why it is critical to remember that young children first feel all interactions before they apply their ability to use language.

Three Steps to Clarity

- ▶ As a parent, how can you "say it like you mean it" so your children will hear your messages as you intended? These three steps will get you started:

Step 1


- ▶ Use clear, consistent, positive communication to help form your child's internal "parenting" voice into a caring one. This practice will guide your children's understanding with kindness and honesty for the rest of their lives.


Step 2

- ▶ Use active listening. This essential ingredient of true communication demonstrates interest and respect for children. Whether you listen well or don't listen well, they copy whatever they see, so model being an active listener

Step 3

- ▶ Get clear on your own "inner parent"; it may be affecting all your communications.
- ▶ This third step is the most important one because your ability to communicate depends on your awareness of the "inner parent" messages you carry from your own childhood.

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- ▶ To get to that awareness, make time to do the following:
 - ▶ Sit down with paper and pen, then take a few moments to clear your mind.
 - ▶ Find a calm and quiet space inside of yourself.
 - ▶ Write as many responses to each of the questions below as you can. (When you've written all you can and feel your mind is blank again, move on to the next question.)





▶ QUESTION 1: The nicest things they ever said to me were _____

▶ QUESTION 2: The voice of the past that echoes most frequently in my head says

▶ QUESTION 3: The unkind things my mother said to me were _____

▶ QUESTION 4: The unkind things my father said to me were _____

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- ▶ Reread what you have written. How many of these words and phrases sound like the expressions you use as a parent now?
 - ▶ Keep the responses you like and embrace them as your own.
 - ▶ Identify the responses you don't like and ask yourself: Am I willing to change them?
 - ▶ Determine how you would make those changes.
 - ▶ Repeat this exercise to see what has really changed over time and to uncover more phrases from your past

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- ▶ When you better understand the emotions that trigger the words you speak, you'll better understand your child's unexpected...and possibly undesirable...responses. And remember that communication is based much more on feeling than on reasoning, especially for young children. So help them grow up knowing how to say what they really mean.



YOU **CAN** STOP FIGHTING WITH YOUR KIDS