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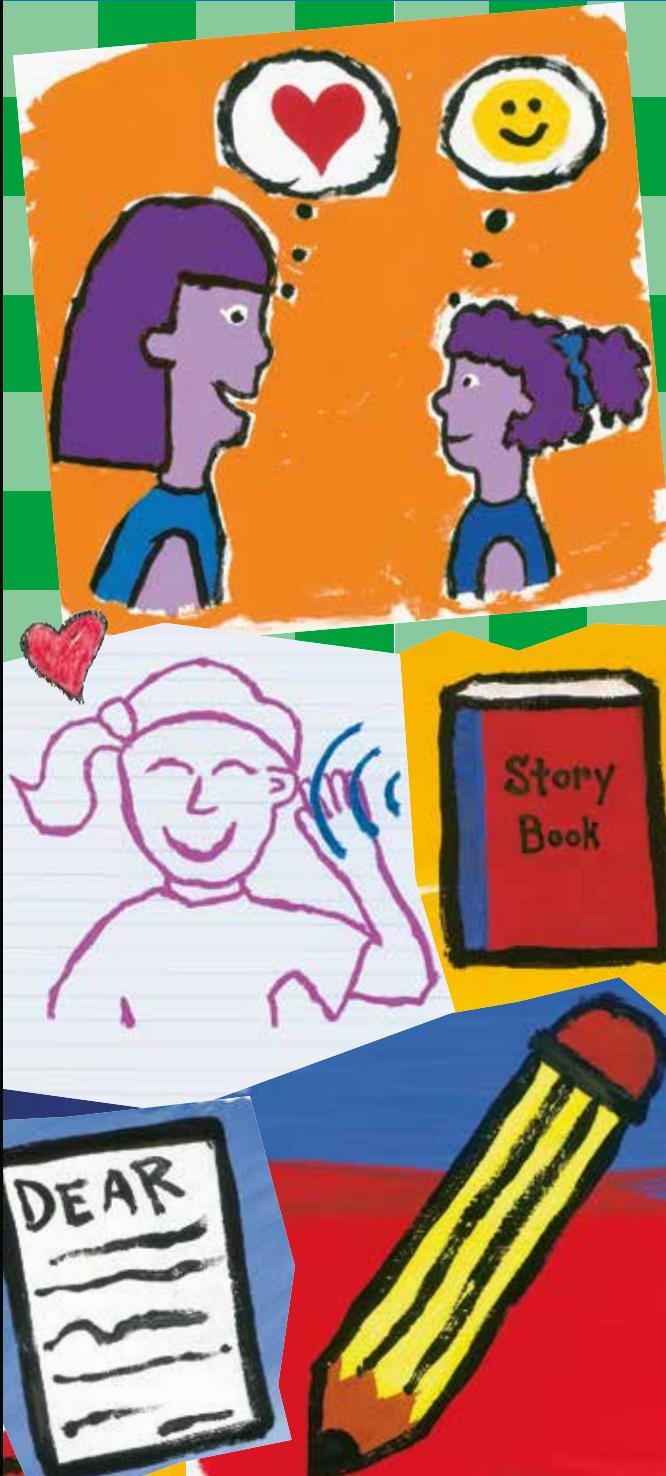
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C H I L D R E N , S H O M E S O C I E T Y O F C A L I F O R N I A

# COMMUNICATION

POSITIVE COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD



Communication involves expressing your thoughts, feelings, and ideas. An essential part of positive communication includes actively listening, speaking clearly and respectfully, role-modeling empathy, and maintaining a positive attitude. Positive communication can help children feel comfortable talking about their thoughts and feelings openly. They can also learn to respect the opinions, feelings, and thoughts of other people. As parents and caregivers, you can take important steps to build healthy communication methods with your children.



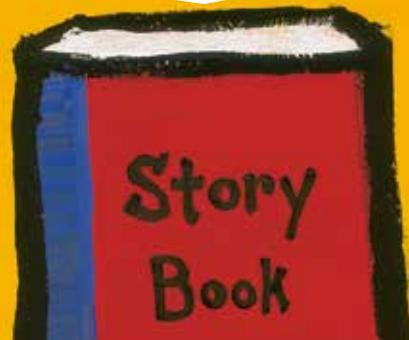
Several elements are needed to build healthy communication skills, such as approaching communication with a loving attitude, listening without interruptions or judgement, being able to appreciate someone else's point of view, and asking questions or restating what the other person said to make sure you understood. Your child can learn to be a positive communicator through your example. By practicing positive communication skills, children can grow to be responsible and thoughtful individuals.

## ★ TIPS FOR HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

Parents and caregivers can help children by addressing their questions, thoughts, feelings, and ideas in a positive and appropriate manner by:

- **Listening patiently:** Your child may not understand their own behavior or the expected, appropriate behavior. Help them understand by listening to what they have to say before redirecting them
- **Clarifying:** Repeat what you understood back to your child to check if you understood them correctly. You can also ask questions if something is unclear. This will help your child feel you are listening to them
- **Providing opportunities for children to solve their own problems:** Gently guide your child to discover their own solutions by acknowledging their thoughts and actions. Respond with brief answers, such as "Yes," "It looks like you are trying to solve this by..." (state specific action), or "What have you tried so far?" This encourages your child to express emotions with words and find solutions to concerns. Asking your child open-ended questions also helps them find answers. For example, "How would you feel if that happened to you?"
- **Speaking in a calm and respectful tone:** This will help your child learn to listen and speak appropriately. A loud, harsh voice may cause your child to be too scared or angry to listen. They may also pick up on this tone and mirror it
- **Choosing the best times to talk about important issues:** If your child is hungry or tired, they may struggle to listen or manage their emotions
- **Using positive language:** Avoid negative statements like, "I don't care what you say," or "You never do what I ask you to do." Instead, try saying "I'm interested in your idea" or "I want to hear what you have to say but I'm distracted right now and I want to give you my full attention. Can we talk when we get home?"
- **Focusing on behavior, not on character:** Instead of labeling the child, focus on the behavior or action. Labeling a child can have a lasting effect on how they see themselves, but a behavior or action is separate from who they are, and is something they have the power to change. For example, "Please place your toys where they belong in the labeled basket. When you throw the toys it can really hurt someone"
- **Being specific with instructions:** This will help avoid misunderstandings. For example, instead of saying, "Clean up your room," say, "Please pick up your books and put them on the shelf in your bedroom"
- **Role-playing:** If your child is having difficulty understanding why they are being redirected, you can role play to help them see the situation from a different perspective. For example, if your child hits another child, use puppets or other toys to "replay" the situation. Role-playing has the added benefit of teaching your child how to see other's people's point of view

Teach your child that it is okay to disagree and the appropriate way to express their opinions. Be aware of your own emotions and help your child express their emotions with words instead of impulsive negative actions against you or others. Communicate and role model to your children with words and actions that you love them.



## ★ OPPORTUNITIES TO COMMUNICATE

As parents and caregivers, you can create opportunities to communicate with your children and be involved in their daily lives by:

- Reading with them. Ask questions about the story or how they would handle a specific situation in the story
- Being involved at school by attending important events, such as parent/teacher conferences, artistic performances, and athletic events; volunteering to chaperone field trips; or helping in your child's classroom or with school events
- Asking open-ended questions about daily activities so your child will respond with more than "yes" or "no." For example, "What did you and your friends do during recess today?" or "What did you like best about dinner tonight?"
- Having family nights, outings, and trips for the purpose of spending time together
- Making time to play together
- Scheduling weekly or monthly family meetings to share information and discuss important family issues
- Being involved with school projects or volunteering to chaperone school events
- Eating meals together whenever possible, providing each family member a chance to talk about their day
- Giving your full attention to your child during conversations or social activities like game nights or meals by putting away phones, tablets, and other technology devices that can be distracting

**Listen to your child speak without interrupting, judging, or criticizing. Encourage your child to express themselves completely.**



## ★ COMMUNICATION WITH YOUNGER CHILDREN

As your infant or toddler begins to form words and phrases, you can develop positive communication with your child by:

- Holding your child close to you when you speak; get down to the child's level
- Making eye contact, stopping, and focusing on your child
- Using a soft, soothing voice
- Speaking clearly and slowly, and repeating when necessary. Even if it may be a babble, add detail, or correct what they have said. For example, if the child states, "I like the ba," you can repeat and state back, "Oh, you like the ball!"

**Talk, read, and sing to them. This exposes the child to new words and language patterns and engages them in the use of language.**

## ★ LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Practicing healthy communication skills with your children will have positive effects on their lives by:

- Encouraging open communication, letting them know they can talk to you even when they are scared or angry
- Cultivating responsibility and independence by teaching them to think about options and the consequences of their actions
- Building their confidence to express themselves
- Helping them develop social and emotional skills that support them to get along well with others



Although children should be encouraged to communicate their own thoughts and feelings, it is important for parents to speak on behalf of their children, as necessary to protect and advocate for them. Children develop confidence in speaking up for themselves at different ages.

## TO LEARN MORE

### BOOKS FOR CHILDREN

#### THE WAY I FEEL

Janan Cain

#### WHAT MAKES ME HAPPY?

Catherine & Laurence Anholt

#### LOTS OF FEELINGS

Shelley Rotner

### BOOKS FOR ADULTS

#### BECOMING THE PARENT YOU WANT TO BE

Laura Davis & Janis Keyser

#### HOW TO TALK SO KIDS WILL LISTEN AND LISTEN SO KIDS WILL TALK

Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish