

So much of our daily life is influenced - for better or for worse - by how we communicate. In fact I have yet to find a 'personal development' program without at least one section dedicated to this area and usually far more than that. Because these skills are so important it is absolutely imperative we pass them on to our children. Yet even with a lot of knowledge in this area it is often with those we love most (and have the greatest affect on) that we fail to use them.

As a result, in this month's article I thought I might point out some of the more common pitfalls parents tend to fall into at some point or another with their kids. This is a huge topic and one that it best done in person (hearing the tone of voice, often makes it more real). Having said that, it is also an area where simple awareness can result in huge changes. So don't feel bad if you recognize yourself in any of pieces below - I'd be amazed if anyone didn't. Instead know that by simply becoming aware and trying out one or two 'respectful' ideas you will be passing on much needed skills that can only have a positive influence on the future.

Common communication pitfalls

Demanding/bossing:	"Pick up your jacket!" (with or without "do you think I'm your maid?")
Meeting with disbelief:	"The teacher yelled at you for no reason? "
Discounting feelings:	"You must be cold...It's cold out here. Put on your jacket."
Using that 'tone':	"Jason"
Telling opinion:	"Oranges aren't your favorite...grapes are your favorite."
Misusing parent power:	"You'll do it and you'll like it, or your play station is gone!"

Communication tools that build respect and self esteem

Ask for things to be done - or <i>describe</i> and let your child come up with the solution.	"Your jacket's on the floor."
Provide <i>choices</i> or <i>set expectations</i> (then try not to nag)	"Are you going to pick it up, or would you like to collect the garbage (make supper, set the table...) while I pick it up?"
Always give your child the <i>benefit of the doubt</i> - you've got nothing to lose by doing this and lots to gain.	"Wow. Your teacher yelled at you for no reason?" (careful not to sound sarcastic, or to roll your eyes, etc... it is a statement which reflects belief)
Try to use <i>active listening</i> to flesh out the story. Listen, clarify, recognize feelings (empathize). Use as calm a tone as you can muster and be aware of your body language. Don't question unnecessarily or try to fix without being asked.	P: "Your teacher yelled at you for no reason? That must have been frustrating..." K: "Yeah, she's so mean." P: "I think I would be angry if someone did that to me." K: "I was embarrassed." P: "So why do you think she did that?" or "what are you going to do now?"
Try to <i>save "no"</i> for when you really have to use it. At the very least be willing to provide a good reason for a "no".	Alternatives to No: "Convince me" or "yes, later"

Remember, even great communication will at times fail to meet the mark. Good thing we get lots of opportunity to practice and try out new ways. You will make mistakes... we all do. It's what we do afterward that makes all the difference.

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