Communication tips to help young minds grow

How and how often we interact with our kids can have a real affect on their development. Children who engage in frequent communication tend to be happier, learn more quickly and get better grades in school. –and give—the most from your communication with your children.



Make communication routine. You don't always need to set aside a special time or place to connect with your kids. Driving to school, shopping, around the dinner table, during bath time or while getting ready for bed are all great times to talk. You can learn new things about each other during the time that you already spend together.

Encourage participation. Children will enjoy interacting with adults if they feel they are part of the discussion. Use open-ended questions and invite their thoughts and opinions. For example, try asking for input on what to have for dinner, where to go for an outing or what movie to rent. Like adults, children share more when they feel their opinions matter.

Really listen. Become an active listener and offer your complete attention for matters big and small. Resist the urge to belittle what may seem silly to you. Try to keep an open mind. Think back to the defining moments in your childhood and remind yourself how important similar issues were to you at that time.

Set aside distractions. When you want to enjoy one-on-one time with your children, turn off the TV, shut down the computer and let the answering machine take your calls. Showing this kind of focus will improve the quality of time you spend with each other and demonstrate to your kids how important they are to you.

Encourage play. Kids use games and stories to express themselves. By participating in play you can pick up useful information about your kids' friends, school activities and interests. Here are a couple of communication games to try:

- **Storyteller.** Make up stories together with one person beginning the tale and the other one finishing it. You can use stories to build self-esteem, teach a lesson, or encourage imagination.

- **Reporter.** Have a make-believe interview with your child and then let them interview you. Let your child's questions and answers lead the conversation into other topics of interest.

Kids don't communicate the way adults do. With young kids, less is more. They speak and think in specific terms and usually see themselves at the centre of everything around them. Use brief, to-the-point messages without excessive detail, and make sure you clearly demonstrate the correlation between what you have to say, and how it affects them and their perspective of the world.

Words to say loud and often. Children really need to hear you say things like "you're important," "I love you," "I'm proud of you" and "I'm so glad you're here." Letting a child know they're valued is hugely important to their development and ability to success in the world.

Although many parents find it difficult to set aside time to really sit down and talk with their kids, those who take the time feel that the payoff is well worth it.