



## Communicating Effectively



Sometimes parents and their children have different styles of communication; hence it seems that the parent-child relationship is conflicted or not-attuned. Before we can begin to improve our communication with others, we have to examine our own style of communication.

People have different styles of communicating; these are the 3 basic, general styles:

	<b>Passive</b>	<b>Aggressive</b>	<b>Assertive</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Communication style in which you put the rights of others before your own, minimizing your own needs.	Communication style in which you stand up for your beliefs, needs, or perceived rights, but without knowing may be violating the rights of others.	Communication style in which you stand up for your needs and rights while maintaining respect for others.
<b>Verbal style</b>	Apologetic; overly soft or tentative tone of voice	Use of “you”-statements; loud tone of voice	Use of “I”-statements; use of firm voice
<b>Non-verbal style</b>	Tend to look down or away; stooped posture, excessive head nodding	Tend to stare, narrow eyes; tense, clenched fists, rigid posture, pointing fingers	Tend to look directly at the other person; good eye-contact; relaxed posture, smooth and relaxed gestures
<b>How others perceive it</b>	Others may perceive that your feelings are not important; others sense that your statements don't matter because you put yourself in an “inferior” position by your own statements.	Others may perceive that your feelings are not important; your statements may not matter to them because you put yourself in a “superior” position (they may perceive you think of yourself superior to them)	Others tend to perceive you as equal (both persons are important); your statements matter, but so does his/hers; your statements are heard
<b>Potential Consequences</b>	lowered self esteem; anger at self; false feelings of inferiority; constantly feeling disrespected, or that pitied by others	Feelings of guilt or anger; lowered self esteem; disrespect or anger from others; feared by others	higher self-esteem; self-respect and a positive self-concept; feel respected

An assertive style of communicating reflects an authoritative style of parenting, in which both parent and child are able to express opinions and needs openly and without judgment. Developmental psychologists have long been interested in how parents impact child development. During the early 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted a study on more than 100 preschool-age children. Using

observation, parental interviews, and other research methods, she identified four important dimensions of parenting: disciplinary strategies, parent's warmth and nurturance, communication styles, & expectations of maturity and control.

### **The Four Parenting Styles:**

Authoritarian Parenting: in this style of parenting, children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents. Failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Authoritarian parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules. If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive to their children. According to Baumrind, these parents are "obedience" and "status" oriented; they expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation. These type of parents model an Aggressive style of communication.

Permissive Parenting: sometimes referred to as "indulgent" parents, have very few demands for their children. These parents rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control. According to Baumrind, permissive parents "are more responsive than they are demanding. They are nontraditional and lenient, do not require mature behavior, allow considerable self-regulation, and avoid confrontation." Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of a friend more than that of a parent, but model a Passive style of communication, or no communication.

Uninvolved Parenting: this style is characterized by few demands, low responsiveness and little to no communication. While these parents fulfill the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life. In extreme cases, these parents may even reject or neglect the needs of their children.

Authoritative Parenting: like authoritarian parents, those with an authoritative parenting style establish rules and guidelines that their children are expected to follow. However, this parenting style is much more democratic. Authoritative parents are responsive to their children and are willing to listen. When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are more nurturing and forgiving, rather than punishing. Baumrind suggests that these parents "monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct. They are Assertive, but not intrusive and restrictive." Their disciplinary methods are supportive, rather than punitive. They want their children to be assertive as well as socially responsible, and self-regulated as well as cooperative, and foster self-control, self-discipline, and open communication.

What effect do these parenting styles have on child development? In addition to Baumrind's initial study, researchers have conducted numerous studies that have led to a number of conclusions about the impact of parenting styles on children. Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem. Authoritative parenting styles tend to result in children who are happy, capable and successful. Permissive parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more likely to experience problems with authority and tend to perform poorly in school. Uninvolved parenting styles rank lowest across all life domains. These children tend to lack self-control, have low self-esteem and are less competent than their peers.

## **How to communicate with your child so they will listen:**

Communicate assertively with your spouse and children in order to communicate effectively. Model for your children what you expect them to do. Sometimes body language says something different to the instructions, for example when you are laughing or smiling when you are telling the child to stop what they are doing. Children ignore parent's instructions when these are shouted when parents are in a different room, because parents are not there to back up the instructions with consequences.

The way that parents give instructions can influence whether children do as they told. The common problems are: giving too many instructions, giving too few or vague instructions, giving too hard or not age-appropriate instructions, and poorly timed instructions (or when these are likely to be ignored).

Parents who disapprove of the child, not the behavior may lower the child's self-esteem. Using name calling, guilt-inducing messages, or shaming the child promotes non-cooperative behaviors, and fosters anger and resentful feelings.

Use the ASK, SAY, DO technique when giving instructions (for ages 3-12):

1. Ask your child what the steps are for what is requested: "what do we do when...?"
2. Say: in a calm manner explain what the expectation is if the child doesn't answer correctly: "first we do... Now you...."
3. Do: if your child doesn't perform the task well, help them. Guide them through it, and stop helping when the child starts to do it on his/her own.
4. Praise cooperation and success at each step.

Use Directed Discussion with older children (for ages 13 and up):

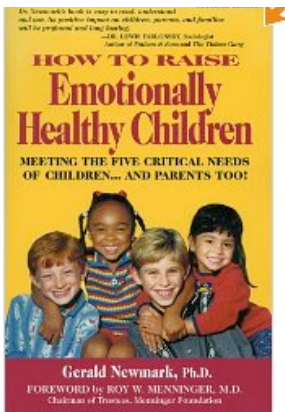
1. Gain your child's attention: come close, make eye contact, and stay calm
2. State the problem briefly, simply, and calmly: make clear statements
3. Briefly re-state why the behavior is a problem: avoid name-calling, criticism, labeling, jumping to conclusions, etc.
4. Clearly re-state the rule/expectation, and request your child follow the rule or practice the correct behavior
5. Listen: give time for your child to express thoughts and feelings, validate emotions, but give consequences as needed
6. Check on your reactions: in order to avoid power-struggles, or giving into the behavior, constantly be aware of how you are feeling, try to seek what is the goal and underlying need
7. Praise your child for the correct or desired behavior, and acknowledge an effort to do the right thing

Make yourself available to talk, and your children will approach you. Listen and they will talk to you. Minimize using name-calling, criticism, and sarcasm, put-downs, threatening, blaming, or minimizing feelings. The goal of communicating openly is not just so children will follow directions, it is also to help them learn how to express themselves effectively and appropriately, so that they don't have to seek negative ways to explore or express themselves. By communicating effectively with your child you are teaching them to be self-sufficient and confident, you are fostering healthy self-esteem, and you are also reinforcing a sense of safety, acceptance, inclusion, importance, and respect at home.

If you and your child are having difficulty communicating, talk to someone to find out the heart of the problem. Seek help for you and your child, and when in doubt, consult with a professional.

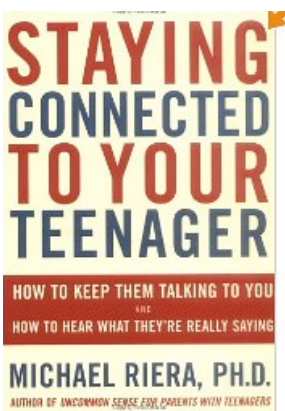
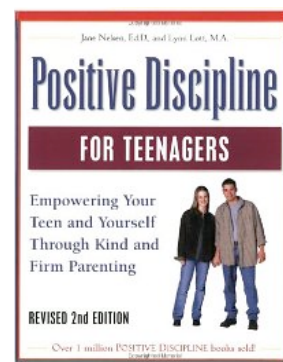
**Remember to praise your child often, make positive statements, eat a meal together weekly, and smile!**

Sources for this material and literature that might help:



How To Raise Emotionally Healthy Children by Gerald Newmark (2008). ISBN: 0932767133, \$12

Positive Discipline for Teenagers by Jane Nelson, and Lynn Lott (2000). ISBN: 076152181X, \$12



Staying Connected to Your Teenager, by Michael Riera (2003). ISBN: 0738208450, \$11