

STEP BY STEP



TO EFFECTIVE PARENTING

COMMUNICATION – RESPONDING TO
CHILDREN

By Ruby M. Johnston

About Step by Step

Parenting is both an exciting and challenging journey. Having a child to love, nurture, and encourage is a blessing. However the journey is filled with challenges which are sometimes puzzling and at other times frustrating. This booklet and others in the series are designed to help you sort through the steps in helping a child grow and develop to reach her fullest potential.

Each booklet contains core information on parenting attitudes, skills and abilities. There are activities to work through to help in applying each strategy. While the booklets contain information which can lead to more effective parenting, it may not answer all the questions a parent might have in the area presented. It is therefore recommended that each and every parent join the thousands of other parents in the journey for lifelong learning. Parenting is a step by step learning process.

We invite you to read all our titles and join us in one of our many different training sessions. We look forward to walking together with you step by step to effective parenting!

Sincerely,

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COMMUNICATION – RESPONDING TO CHILDREN

Children learn what they live. You have probably heard this before-and it's true! Parents can be great models for children to learn many things, including how to communicate effectively. Effective communication occurs when both people involved know they are being understood.

Every parent wants his/her child to feel successful, worthwhile and loved. When children feel they are being talked “at” instead of talked “with”, they can feel unloved, unheard and incapable. Effective communication can help prevent this. Developing communication and listening skills will promote relationship building for the entire family.

The goal of this guide is to provide you, the parent, with information which will help you understand your children better. By using this information, your children will know they are understood and learn to follow your example.

The next few pages of this guide contain the following:

- 12 Categories of Typical Communication Responses
- Practice Activities
- Additional STEP-BY-STEP topics and titles.



TWELVE CATEGORIES OF COMMUNICATION RESPONSES

Parents choose different responses when talking with children. These responses typically fall into twelve categories. Each response delivers a message and has benefits and/or liabilities.

1. Ordering, Directing, and Commanding:

This category of responses is used when the child needs to hear clear direction and there is no negotiation allowed. For example, "Annya, you must go to bed now." Clear and direct responses are sometimes necessary.

The liability comes when this is the only way a parent communicates. If a child is never given choices, advice or encouragement he/she may begin to feel the pressure of unreasonable control.

2. Warning, Admonishing, and Threatening:

This category of responses is best used when the child does not understand the consequences of his/her behavior. For example, "Sasha, you have only 1 hour to be ready or you will miss your ride to your lesson."

These types of responses are not helpful when they are coercive and make a child fearful of simple mistakes, accidents or even his or her own parents.

3. Exhorting, Moralizing:

This category of response is about telling the child what he should or ought to do. For example, "You should always respect your teachers." This is best used when accompanied by an explanation such as, "You should always respect your teachers because they work hard to help you and the other students."

These types of responses can be detrimental if they are so rigid they do not allow any exceptions. Considering the example of a teacher, it

is possible that your child's teacher may behave inappropriately. If so, a child should know it is okay to tell you, the parent, about this.

4. Advising, Giving Solutions, and Giving Suggestions:

This category of response is helpful when you are helping a child solve a problem, giving him advice or offering suggestions. This category of response is useful when the child is having difficulty coming up with a solution. For example, "Just wait for a few minutes and then decide. This will give you time to consider all the alternatives."

Problems can arise from these types of responses if they are used too often or before a child is given a chance at problem solving. Remember, there are times when children can benefit from making mistakes.

5. Lecturing, Teaching, Giving Logical Arguments:

This category of response is used when you are trying to influence your child with facts, counterarguments, logic, information or your own opinions. An example of a helpful response is, "By learning to take responsibility in helping around the house, you are also learning how to be a responsible adult. I need your help now."

Again, too much of these types of responses can be hurtful to the child. A child may learn to resent long lectures if they come with every interaction he has with his parents.

6. Judging, Criticizing, Disagreeing, Blaming;

When using responses in this category, you are making a negative judgment or evaluation. This can cause a lot of pain for the child. Most responses of this type are more hurtful than helpful. An example of a hurtful response is, "I think that is a very immature response and you are a very immature person."

A more helpful and less hurtful way to disagree might be, "Perhaps that is one way of looking at things, lets look at it another way for a moment."

7. Praising, Agreeing:

Responses in this category offer a positive evaluation or judgment. Good examples of this category of responses are, "You have the ability to think this through," or "I agree with you, good idea!"

8. Name Calling, Ridiculing, and Shaming:

A response from this category is never helpful for the child - adult relationship. It makes the child feel foolish, puts them into a category or shames him. Comments that hurt are similar to this, "You are a brat," or "Okay, little baby," or "You are acting like an animal."

9. Interpreting, Analyzing, and Diagnosing:

This category of responses tells the child what you think his motives are or analyzes why he is doing or saying something. It communicates that you have figured him out or have him diagnosed. These types of responses can be helpful if they are framed in a way that allows the child to confirm or correct your response. Examples include, "You seem to be jealous of your friend," or "Are you saying that to hurt her?"

These types the responses can be harmful when you have wrongly interpreted a child's feelings and make a statement that leaves no room for correction. For instance, "I know you are jealous of your friend." Or you may ascribe false motives to your child's behavior by saying something like, "I know you broke that plate just because you do not like to wash dishes!"

10. Reassuring, Sympathizing, Consoling, Supporting:

This category of responses is used to help the child feel better, provide comfort and show understanding, and help to reduce or overcome negative feelings. For example, "You will feel different in a day or so," or "I know school can be very difficult sometimes," or "All kids go through this from time to time."

When offering this type of response, it is important that you do not trivialize a child's feelings so much they feel ignored. This can happen when saying things like, "Just get over it." It is equally important that a child is not overindulged if overreacting to a minor difficulty. For example, in most cases a very minor scrape on the knee would not involved several hours of crying.

11. Withdrawing, Distracting, Humoring, Diverting:

Responses in this category work well when attempting to get the child away from a problem, or to withdraw from a problem yourself. For example, "Let's not talk about this during dinner," or "Let's talk about something more pleasant right now. We can come back to that later."

Problems may arise if these types of responses are consistently used to avoid speaking about topics and situations that should be discussed. It is okay to postpone an important conversation to a more appropriate time. Just be sure to find the time to have the conversation later.

12. Probing, Questioning, Interrogating:

This category of responses can help the child find the reasons, motives, or causes of something. It helps the child search for more information in order to solve a problem. Examples are, "When did you start feeling this way?" or "Have you talked to your teacher about how you are feeling about your homework assignment?"

One way these types of responses can be harmful is when questions are asked in rapidfire succession without time for a response. For example, "Why did you do that? What were you thinking? Didn't you know what would happen if you did that?"



ACTIVITY TIME: IDENTIFYING NEGATIVE RESPONSES

Return to the above list and underline the specific responses in some of the categories that are clearly negative. (Answers below.)

The words we use are important. Some words have similar meanings, but evoke different emotions. Some are more negative than others. This is how communication works. For example, I can ask questions or I can interrogate. Which would you prefer? I can give a warning or I can threaten. Which would convey better feelings?

ANSWERS: Commanding, Threatening, Moralizing, Criticizing, Blaming, Name Calling, Ridiculing, Shaming, Interrogating.



FINAL STEP

We want to build strong relationships with our children; therefore, we need to learn to communicate with them in ways that are teaching, encouraging, supporting and responding to their needs. As you have learned in this STEP-BY-STEP booklet, you have many choices in the way that you respond to your children. Practice using different positive responses, and make an effort to avoid responses that can be nonproductive and hurtful.

We encourage you to continue to build on what you learn through these experiences. As you do so, we think you will open new pathways to better communication, and develop strong and encouraging relationships with your children.

OTHER STEP BY STEP TITLES WITH NUMBERS

1. Understanding Child Development – Birth to Two – “The Infant”
2. Understanding Child Development – Three to Five – “The Preschooler”
3. Understanding Child Development – Six to Eleven – “The School Aged Child”
4. Understanding Child Development – Twelve to Fifteen – “The Young Teen”
5. Understanding Child Development – Sixteen to Eighteen – “The Older Teen”
6. Communication – Responding to Children
7. Communication – Feelings
8. Communication – Asking Children Strength- Focused Questions
9. Communication – Being Direct with Children
10. Communication - The Languages of Love for Your Child
11. Communication – What you Say and How you Say It
12. What Every Parent Should Know About Child Abuse
13. Sharing Secrets and Keeping Surprises – James’s Story
14. Teaching Your Child to Say, “NO” – Jessica’s Story
15. Understanding Childhood Illnesses
16. Caring for a Sick Child
17. Disease and How it Spreads
18. First Aide – What Parents Need to Know
19. Home Safety
20. Childproofing Your Home
21. Teaching Safety
22. Food Safety
23. Foodborn Illness
24. Nutrition
25. Feeding Problems
26. Bringing a Foster Child Into Your Home
27. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Family
28. Understanding the Effects of Fostering on the Marriage
29. Guide to Dealing with Stress As a Parent
30. Guide to Building a Healthy Marriage Relationship
31. Bringing our Adopted Child into Our Home
32. Helping Children Understand Adoption
33. Joining With my Adopted Child’s Culture
34. Understanding the Birth Parent of My Child
35. The Blended Family
36. When Family Members Treat My Foster or Adoptive Child Different
37. Understanding Attachment
38. Recreating History for My Adopted Child

39. Helping the Child who has been Sexually Abused
40. Teaching about Sexuality
 - a. How to Talk to Your Child
 - b. How to Talk to Your Parents
41. Understanding Sexual Behaviors
42. Teaching Your Child about Abstinence
43. Talking to your Teen about Identity
44. Contracting with Your Teen About Behavior
45. Developing Responsibility
46. Teaching Your Child to Build Relationships
47. Teaching about Marriage and Family
48. Telling Your Child Someone has Died
49. Understanding the Grieving Cycle
50. Understanding and Approaching Behavior
51. Dealing with Lying
52. Toilet Training and Bedwetting
53. Dealing with Defiance
54. Dealing with Hitting and Biting
55. Dealing with Stealing
56. Dealing with Anger
57. Dealing with Fighting
58. The Child Who Plays With Fire
59. Helping My Child Deal with Fear
60. Helping My Child Kick a Bad Habit
61. Help with Tattling
62. Dealing with the Two Year Old's Temper Tantrum
63. Help with Thumb Sucking
64. Help with Bedtime Problems
65. Dealing with Substance Abuse
66. Understanding Suicide
67. Developing Good Study Habits for School
68. Dealing with Failure
69. Demonstrating Manners
70. Helping Siblings Get Along
71. Nurturing Optimism

MORE TITLES TO BE DEVELOPED IN THE FUTURE