

ParentBrief



How do I talk to my children? Put on your listening ears

Our kids often hear the phrase 'put on your listening ears'. It's a reminder to stop talking, pay attention, and (hopefully) absorb what's being said. But as parents, how often is this said to us? When was the last time you heard 'mum....dad...put on your listening ears'. How often would our kids like to say to us 'stop talking, pay attention, and (hopefully) absorb what I'm saying'. By nature of their age and size, kids are used to being spoken at and told what to do. But maybe it's time we took a leaf out of their book and really listened to what they have to say...

The two-way deal

Communication begins at birth. Crying is an important part of a baby's language and the most effective way in which a baby can communicate. As parents, we have to listen for the cries and be intuitive to our baby's needs.

As kids grow and develop language, they also learn about boundaries, consequences and ways to explore their world, but until they can communicate effectively with words, parents don't need to listen as much as monitor body language and behaviour. Kids of all ages do require guidance, and boundaries need to be set and reinforced often, so the need to talk to our child sometimes has to take precedence over talking with them. But from babyhood through to young adults, nothing is more special than a one-on-one chat with a parent...especially when mum or dad has their listening ears on.

Talking with, not to

Taking the time to listen, rather than constantly giving advice, is a sure fire way of developing a positive relationship with our child. When we sit with our kids, face to face (not answering emails, checking texts or updating our social media account), and we really listen to what they have to say, three very special things happen. First, we get to know our kids; how they think and what they think. Second, we help to build a child's self-esteem and support their speech and language development. Third, we reinforce for our kids that they are valued, acknowledged and cared for. They feel secure, wanted, appreciated and that their voice and opinions matter.

Listening up vs. providing solutions

One of our prime jobs as parents is to help our kids navigate a path through their world. But as our kids develop and mature, 'guiding' through listening and giving helpful advice is better value than 'telling' and providing solutions.

- Listening gives you a window into how much your child understands and what they believe and think about their world.
- Give your child your full attention. Make eye contact.
- Help kids to brainstorm and problem solve, rather than providing a solution.
- Have patience with the kids who need to ask the same question over and over. Many kids will revisit a topic to find out more.
- Accept your child's opinion or their take on something. This then gives you the chance to assist them to develop clear and logical thinking processes while at the same time helping them to process their thoughts.
- Always respect a child's feelings. Try to avoid words such as 'that's silly' or 'you are old enough to know better than that'.
- Listen to a child's interpretation of things, then help them put a positive spin on something or realise that perhaps what they had assumed is not in fact the reality.

As parents, we can learn heaps from our kids. But if all we do is offer our advice, our opinion, our prejudices or our take on the world, we're denying them opportunities to feel important, secure, self-confident and positive about the things they have to say.