Effective communication with loved ones is the glue that holds families together. Research shows that the presence of effective communication is one of the most frequently mentioned characteristics of healthy families.

Good communication involves clear, open, and frequent dialogue. Every single day offers a new chance to think about how we communicate with our family members—our mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers…and everyone else special enough to be part of our family.

Listening and talking is the key to a healthy connection between you and your children. Consider the following tips to improve communication with your children and teens.

**TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

**Let your kids know you’re listening**
Having small conversations often is really important. For example, when your child comes to show you something or ask a question, stop what you are doing and take a moment to exchange a few words about what he or she is interested in.

**Be available for your children**
When it comes communicating with your child, the most important thing is to provide an opportunity for conversations to happen. Notice times when your kids are most likely to talk — for example, at bedtime, before dinner or in the car — and be available. Having short, casual and pleasant conversations as often as you can sets the stage for longer or more serious talks when necessary. Afterall, we don’t want to get stuck lecturing or nagging in the few precious moments we have to really talk to our kids.

**Respond in a way your children will hear**
Soften strong reactions because kids will tune you out if you appear angry or defensive. Acknowledge that it’s okay to disagree and refrain from arguing about who is right.
Remember:

- Ask your children what they want or need from you in a conversation, such as advice, simply listening, help in dealing with feelings or help solving a problem.

- Kids learn by imitating. They will most often follow your lead in how they deal with anger, solve problems and work through difficult feelings.

- Talk to your children, don’t lecture, criticize, threaten or say hurtful things.

- Realize your children may test you by telling you a small part of what is bothering them. Listen carefully to what they say, encourage them to talk and they may share the rest of the story.

It’s true, parenting is hard work and maintaining a good connection with teens can be challenging, especially since parents are dealing with many other pressures. If you are having problems with communication over an extended period of time, consider seeking professional help.

MORE INFORMATION:
American Psychological Association | www.apa.org
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services | www.hhs.gov
Triple P-Positive Parenting Program | www.triplep.net

Message provided by the University of South Carolina Institute for Families in Society, in partnership with Hold Out the Lifeline: A Mission to Families
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