

## Tips for Effectively Communicating with Your Children

We want our children to be able to talk to us about anything—the good and the bad. This requires a lot of patience and hard work. However, open, honest and effective communication can bind your family together and set the stage for your children to achieve successful communication and positive relationships in all aspects of life.

### Some tips:

- **Openly show your love, affection and acceptance.** Children who feel safe and secure, are more likely to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Invest the time to connect with your children.** Make yourself available to each of your children and let them know that your time together is important to you.
- **Set aside time each day to talk.** This can be informally during car rides, dinner, bedtime or at a more formal family meeting. Make sure to follow up on any issues discussed.
- **Initiate conversation.** Talk to your children about things they are involved or interested in. To avoid one-word responses, ask open-ended questions and request that they “tell you more” or “further explain.”
- **For younger children, communicate at their level.** Physically lower your body (kneel, sit, etc.) and use age-appropriate language.
- **Really listen.** Eliminate all distractions and give your children your undivided attention. Make eye contact and let them know that they are being heard. Allow them to express their feelings and don't interrupt. (This is difficult and takes a lot of practice.)
- **Don't get discouraged, especially when dealing with adolescents/teenagers.** Although teens may act like they don't want to talk, they still do and need to talk to you. Figure out the situations where your children are most comfortable and willing to share their thoughts—i.e. sitting side-by-side when driving, when making dinner, while doing chores, etc. Be patient and ready to listen when the timing is right for them and they are ready to talk.
- **Pay close attention to not only your children's words, but also their body language, actions, emotions and intensity.** This will help you better understand your children and help you continually monitor their behavior.
- **Acknowledge what your children have shared.** Sympathize, be supportive and understanding. Don't blame, criticize or get overly emotional. Use "I" language, especially when emotions are involved—i.e., "I feel upset by what you said...", "I am confused...", etc. Show acceptance of each of your children, regardless of what they have or have not done.
- **Express your own feelings and values in a non-judgmental way.**
- **Avoid negative communication** (i.e., nagging, lecturing, using guilt, sarcasm or threats, lying, and telling your children what to do without acknowledging their feelings).
- **Praise your children's efforts to communicate.** Let them know that you value what they have to say.

Consistent and effective communication can lead to stronger relationships with your children. The mutual respect and trust developed may make it easier for them to share more information with you as they get older. In addition, the skills learned through daily communication (both speaking and listening), help build your children's self-esteem and confidence and enable them to more easily communicate with others throughout their daily lives.

*Tips provided by Barrington Youth & Family Services (BYFS), a non-profit mental health agency providing services for Barrington area youth and their families residing within the boundaries of Barrington Community Unit School District 220.*

*BYFS offers comprehensive counseling, youth outreach and prevention programs. For more information, visit [www.barringtonyouthandfamilyservices.org](http://www.barringtonyouthandfamilyservices.org) or call 847.381.0345.*

