

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Improving communication

Sometimes it seems that whatever you say to your child, it is taken the wrong way. Sometimes they will not talk to you at all, or only when they want something. You may feel angry if they will not talk to you with respect.

Communication involves expressing our feelings and wishes, with the hope that we will be 'heard' and respected.

There are things you can do to improve communication with your young person.

### Improving communication

In many traditional cultures children are raised to always obey their elders.

As your child grows into adolescence in this new country:

- They might stop listening to what they are being told.
- They might start arguing with you.
- They may want to be the boss in the family.
- They might act like they don't care about you.
- They might stop taking interest in your customs and cultural beliefs.

Parents can find it very hard to understand what is going on.

### Rebellion

Some young people rebel against their parents or caregivers in order to get attention or to show they are growing up.

Sometimes they rebel by behaving badly or in ways that adults find difficult to understand.

Maybe your young person is ignoring everything you say or disagreeing with you all the time. You may feel angry if they don't talk to you with respect.

These young people are trying to act tough. However, they might be hiding deep feelings of insecurity, sadness, anger, confusion, fear or guilt.

They might be trying hard to fit in with other young people their own age. They are trying to be less dependent on you.

### What should parents do?

- Keep gentle and calm.
- Don't over-react to small mistakes.

- Try to find out if they are having problems with school, friends, work, their health etc
- Agree on rules that both you and your child think are fair.
- Talk with your heart open, even when their heart seems closed.
- Tell stories about your past and your customs that will amuse them.
- Praise your young person when they do positive things.

Remember this stage of your child's life will pass. As your young person matures, their respect and interest in you, your culture and customs will probably come back again.

### Our bodies talk too

Remember your body language tells the main story about your feelings. Think, what does your tone of voice and the way you are standing or sitting, tell your child about how you feel about them? Are you looking cross and angry a lot of the time?

In Anglo-Saxon families children look at their parents directly. Perhaps in your culture it is rude to look directly at someone older when you are talking to them. If your child forgets what your custom is, be understanding. Remind them gently.

Children from migrant families are trying to find a middle pathway between two cultures.

### Do things together

Sometimes talking is hard work. Talking can be easier if you are doing something together. Try doing some activities together in a happy way: cooking, watching television, sewing, fishing, visiting old friends.

Get to know their friends. Welcome them into your home. Teach them about your way of doing things.

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Improving communication

### What not to say

Some ways of talking will make your teenager angry or upset.

#### Try not to:

- Always tell them what to do.
- Give answers before they ask.
- Remind them of weaknesses.
- Tease them or call them names.
- Always tell them what their problem is.
- Always remind them of past mistakes.
- Ask too many questions.
- Tell them they bring shame on the family.

#### Instead try to:

- Encourage them when they do things right.
- Thank them when they help you.
- Show them you notice the good things they do.

It is great to have times when the conversation is relaxed and not about important or hard things. Even though you might be busy, tired and stressed, try to have friendly conversations with your children each day.

### Chose the right time to talk about problems

- Plan ahead.
- Pick a time when you are both calm.
- Say some good things about them first.
- Don't blame your child for the problem. Talk openly about what has happened and why.
- Gently remind them of the rules you both agreed on.
- Talk about whether the rules now need to be changed because they no longer make sense.

### The wrong time for talking about problems is when:

- They just walk in the door.
- They just get up.
- They are already upset.
- They have used drugs or alcohol.

Remember two people can both be right. You don't always have to agree.

Talking and listening well helps you understand the way each person is thinking. Sometimes things don't get sorted. Good talking and listening helps people respect each other.

### Show your children how to keep calm and listen

Parents teach their children good communication skills by:

- Keeping calm.
- Listening more than talking.
- Trying to understand.
- Looking for a middle path.

Your young person can learn all this from you.

### Where to get help

If your child has problems and they have stopped listening to you, think about other people who they might talk and listen to:

- A grandparent, aunt or uncle?
- A good friend or neighbour?
- A church leader or imam?
- An elder?
- A community worker?
- Their doctor?

You might need to ask someone else for help in giving your young person guidance.

Make sure you are comfortable with the advice they will give.

Don't let shame stop you from helping them to get the help they need.

#### → Related Fact Sheets

- Adolescent Development
- Settling into a new country
- Dealing with Conflict
- Dealing with Violence

## Strong Bonds Fact Sheet: Parents : Improving communication

### → Tips from this Fact Sheet

- Carefully choose the best time to talk to your child about important things.
- Be careful to not always be criticizing your child.
- Adolescents like to make more decisions for themselves.
- Adults aren't always right. Listen and try to find a middle path.
- If your child has problems and has stopped listening to you, it is important to ask people you can trust for help.

**Strong Bonds**  
Jesuit Social Services  
PO Box 1141  
COLLINGWOOD VIC 3066

Tel (03) 9415 8700  
Email [info@strongbonds.jss.org.au](mailto:info@strongbonds.jss.org.au)  
Web [www.strongbonds.jss.org.au](http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au)

