

Parenting Tools:

- Communication -



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Communication is an important tool in any relationship but is especially important at the beginning of the Trunk years. As your child is beginning to ask tough questions and is beginning to develop a moral sense, establish good parent/child communication, so that you can continue to be the most influential voice in your child's life throughout these formative years.

Tips for communicating with your 6-year-old:

1. Talk to your kids—a lot! Talk about anything and everything! Let this be the silent but understood agreement between you and your kids: you will listen as long as they want to talk! It isn't necessary to come back with corrective phrases, try to improve on your kids' perspective, evaluate, judge, or ultimately prove that you know more than they know. Try responding with phrases such as "I never thought about it that way," or "that's an interesting way to look at it," or "I can tell you've given this a lot of thought." When you have a chance to engage your child in conversation, leave the child feeling good about himself/herself and about your relationship.

Deuteronomy

6:5–7 commands us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." Talk about life, and show your kids how Jesus fits into every part of it!

2. Learn the difference between responding and reacting. If you want to keep the lines of communication open, practice responding

instead of reacting. Certainly there are times when parents need to react, but, all too often, we tend to react in a knee-jerk kind-of-way that alarms our kids needlessly and makes them feel belittled. If a kid knocks over his milk at the breakfast table, you can react and get all bent out of shape over it, saying, “What a mess you’ve made! Now get down, and clean it up! No more milk for you!” On the other hand, you can respond and say, “Uh-oh. There’s a towel by the sink you can use to clean that up. Accidents like that happen when your glass is too close to the edge of the table.”

Responding and reacting reflect your personal attitudes. Move with caution, so you can keep your relationship with your kids positive and open. Ephesians 6:4 warns us, “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

3. Watch your tone of voice. Realize that your tone of voice is a reflection of your attitude as well. Colossians 4:6 says, “Let your conversation be gracious and effective.” Why? “...So that you will have the right answer for everyone” (NLT). Not just the “right answer” in terms of what you say, but how you say it. Are you familiar with the “93-7 Principle” in communication? This principle explains how only 7 percent of the effectiveness of communication comes from the words we use, while 93 percent comes from how we say what we say. If your tone is calm and relaxed, your communication will be much more “gracious and effective.” Your kids will want to talk to you and listen to what you have to say!

Remember, your countenance and attitude can either encourage or discourage conversation. When your kids come to you, they need to be thinking, “I can talk to my mom and dad about anything, and I won’t be embarrassed, judged, evaluated, or made to feel stupid,

selfish, or inadequate. Kids may not be thinking these exact words, but that’s what they will be feeling.

This is your time to establish that you, as the parent, are the person to come to for information and the Truth. Answer all questions truthfully and clearly, even the questions that make you squirm. If you don’t know the answer, tell them that; find out the answer, and get back to them. If you prove to answer honestly and provide your children with the information they are looking for, they will continue to come back to you throughout the Trunk years and into the Branch years as well.