

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Do The Kids Really Know How You Feel?

from the American Counseling Association

Experts will constantly tell you that good communication is a necessary element in any successful relationship. While we generally think of that advice in relation to spouses, friends and co-workers, one of the most important relationships to evaluate for good communication is with our children.

Do your kids really know how you feel about them? Yes, they should assume you care about them, since you provide shelter and food, but are you really communicating your love, care and pride in them on a regular basis?

It's easy to do when our children are small. Babies and toddlers are easy to hug and whisper "I love you" to even when misbehaving. But that constant communication of love often diminishes as our children grow up, and may almost disappear as we face a grumpy teen whose response to most communication efforts is a grunt, eye-roll or that ever popular, "Whatever."

But regardless of a child's age, or attitude, it's important to communicate your positive feelings in a variety of ways. The easiest, and most direct, is simply to say, "I love you" on a regular basis. Even if the response is only, "Yeah, whatever," your children should know your bottom line is that you really love them.

There are other important ways to communicate your feelings for your children. Simply demonstrating that you care about your child's world and its problems will always improve parent and child communication. When your child wants to share, you need to take the time to listen to what he or she is saying. Your job isn't to judge, criticize, or dismiss the problems, but to really listen, to understand and to care about what you're hearing.

It's also vital that you let your children know you're proud of them. When a child puts in extra effort and is truly working hard, that's the time to tell him or her how proud you are of that effort and of what's being accomplished. Learn to praise the effort being expended, not just the final result, and you can help motivate a child to continue to work hard and be proud of their achievements.

Communicating with our children can often be difficult task, especially as they become teenagers, but putting a real, daily effort into communicating to your child the love, caring and pride you have for him or her can only result in a stronger, more positive relationship.

Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org.

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