

Age-appropriate communication

Communication with your child

The best ways to avoid conflict with your children is by communicating with them in age-appropriate ways. Expressing your expectations clearly and frequently in a language they understand will help your child adapt to your family rules and requirements.

It's always good practice to listen to your child at any age. Listening carefully with your ears and your eyes will help your child to communicate better with you and create lasting bonds.

What parents can do

If your child is ages 2-3:

- Physically get down to their level and look your child directly in the eye.
- Speak in short sentences so they can follow the conversation easily.
- It is normal for children this age to have difficulty transitioning from one activity to the next. If you are asking your child to clean up, tell him he has five more minutes to play. Stick to the five minutes and help him clean up so that you can go on to the next activity.
- "Show and tell" helps increase your child's understanding. Demonstrate what you want her to do as you tell her.

If your child is ages 4-5:

- Look directly into your child's eyes.
- At this age, a child can understand longer sentences and more complex directions, but avoid asking your child to do more than two or three things at a time.

- Be clear when you give your child directions.
- Children this age love to negotiate. Encourage your child to share his or her thoughts and feelings. Listen to what he has to say and work out a plan that accommodates both of your goals.

If your child is ages 6-12:

- Look directly into your child's eyes.
- Children in this age group understand reasons for your expectations. Have honest and direct conversations with your child. Children this age can share their ideas and opinions in fairly clear speech. Encourage your child to articulate her ideas.
- Children this age love to engage in animated debates and are beginning to articulate more complex thinking patterns.

If your child is a teenager:

- Continue to build on the communication skills and rapport you have established early on to keep your teenager talking with you. Communication doesn't stop after age 12.
- This is the most critical time to communicate with your children and the hardest time for them to open up to you, but don't give up. Your child will be reassured by your interest.

Expressing your expectations clearly and frequently will help your child understand family rules and requirements.