

Last week I watched a video that was made by a group of boys attending the Family Resource Association KidVid program.

The boys picked a topic for which they had strong feelings. "Parents Don't Listen!" was their message.

This got me thinking about what it means to listen to our children, and do adults and children have the same definition of "listening"?

The examples I saw in the KidVid production had two central themes. One, parents ignore kids and miss important stuff; and two, parents react first and then sort things out later.

If true, these behaviours have many implications on a child's development.

There are numerous parenting workshops available and most of them include tips on listening.

It seems to me that listening begins, as most things do, with WANTING to listen. Techniques help only when you have made the decision that this is important, this is something that I want to do.

We all have to find our own motivation for wanting to listen but most certainly better communication with our child is desirable. Both formal studies and anecdotal evidence support that good communication is essential to building healthy relationships in almost any context.

Once we have the desire to be a good listener, it is time to learn a few tools to make it happen.

In my opinion, eye contact would be at the top of any list of effective strategies. Maintaining eye contact puts into play a number of other techniques.

For example, to have eye contact we need to be in the same room with our child at the time of communication, not calling from another room, as most of us have done at least once or twice. As well, eye contact requires positioning ourselves so that we are face to face with our child, not turned away with our attention on another task.

If the child is small, we quite often need to kneel or bend significantly to have eye contact, thus meeting the child on common ground.

Most of us have heard the expression "the eyes are the reflection of the soul." One can infer from this that eye contact is a message in itself.

There is much going on in the eyes that can provide depth to a simple message. Through eye contact, parents can let their children know "I am here for you, I am interested in what you have to say, you have great value to me, I love you."

Another significant benefit of having eye contact is that you need to stop what you are doing. Once you slow down, you can begin to tune in and hear what your child is saying.

This is the main part of communication... hearing the message.

Then you need to acknowledge that you heard. That acknowledgement tells the child you care.

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