



Dan Weinstein, PsyD, LLC
Licensed Psychologist

7730 Carondelet Avenue ◊ Suite 307 ◊ Clayton, Missouri ◊ 63105
314-721-7201 office ◊ 314-721-7209 fax ◊ dan@doctordanw.com
www.doctordanw.com

The Art of the Parent-Child Kibitz: How to Improve Communication between You and Your Child

Dan Weinstein, Psy.D.

1. Help Children Deal with Their Feelings

- Listen with full attention
- Acknowledge his feelings with a word or two
 - Resist your desire to fix or instantly make it better
 - Instead of giving advice accept and reflect your child's feelings
- Name the child's feeling
 - Help show her you are trying to acknowledge her experience
 - Provide empathy to show him that you are trying to understand how he feels
 - Avoid asking “why” he feels that way
 - You do not have to agree with his feelings, just acknowledge them
 - Try not to parrot or repeat her exact words back to her
 - Give his wishes back to him in fantasy

2. Engage Cooperation

- There is a conflict of needs
- Describe
 - Describe what you see, or describe the problem
 - Reduces finger-pointing and accusation, helps everyone focus on what needs to be done
- Give information
 - Helps the child experience it as an act of confidence in him
- Say it with a word (use 1-3 words, maximum)
 - Saves time, breath, and boring explanations

- A welcome relief from the usual lecture
- Instead of an impressive command we give the child an opportunity to exercise her own initiative and her own intelligence
- Talk about your feelings
 - If the child's feelings are respected they are likely to respect the adult's feelings
- Write them a note
 - Quick, easy, and pleasant way to get through to a child
 - Children love to receive notes, even if they cannot read
 - Makes them aware you cared enough to take the time to write the note

3. Use Alternatives to Punishment When Possible

- Notice and acknowledge positive behavior and ignore negative behavior whenever possible
- Use reward systems
 - To be effective, reward systems must be frequent, immediate, varied, and concrete
 - Provide opportunities to earn privileges daily so he will be more motivated to behave
 - Gives the child constant reminders of successes achieved
 - Rewards also must include a wide range of privileges/prizes
 - Parents have to use their imagination to come up with new possibilities
- Point out a way to be helpful
 - Give them a task, engage them as a team member who needs to help
- Express strong disapproval (without attacking character)
 - While also pointing out the way toward helping a child make amends
- State your expectations
- Show the child how to make amends
 - Knowing what not to do is not as helpful as knowing what to do in a given situation
- Give a choice
- Take action
- Allow the child to experience the consequences of his misbehavior
 - Natural consequences - come about as a natural result of the child's behavior

4. Teach Your Child How to Problem-Solve

- Talk about the child's feelings and needs
- Talk about your feelings and needs
- Brainstorm together to find a mutually agreeable solution
- Write down all ideas - without evaluating
- Mutually decide which suggestions you like, which you don't like, and which suggestion you plan to follow through on

5. Encourage Autonomy

- Let children make choices
- Show respect for a child's struggle
- Don't ask too many questions
- Don't rush to answer questions
- Give her a chance to explore the answers for herself at first
- Encourage children to use sources outside the home (e.g., the dentist to find out what happens to children when they do not brush their teeth regularly)
- Don't take away hope

6. Use Praise Carefully

- Instead of evaluating, describe
- Be selective when you use praise
- Describe what you see and what you feel
- Sum up the child's praiseworthy behavior with a word
- Make sure your praise is appropriate to your child's age and level of ability
- Try not to be excessively enthusiastic
- Try to stimulate self-pride

References:

- Barkley, R. & Benton, C. (1998). Your defiant child. New York: NY, Guilford Publications.
- Faber, A. & Mazlish, E. (1999). How to talk so kids will listen & listen so kids will talk. New York: NY, Harper Collins.