

Parent tip sheet: watch out for communication traps

The key to getting children to talk is to listen. You might think that you are being a good listener when you are not. It may help to check that you are not doing something else instead such as:

Advising - "Tom wouldn't let me play with him today." "I'd take no notice if I were you, go and play with Peter tomorrow instead".

Criticising - "Joe took my book and lied and said it was his and my teacher believed him!" "Well I told you not to take it to school".

Dismissing - "Emily broke my bracelet." "Oh, it doesn't matter. We can just get another one when we go shopping"

Correcting - "It wasn't fair at tea time, you are always nicer to Sally than you are to me!" "You mean Breakfast time."

Ignoring - "I need mummy to take me to Claire's' house after school." "Come and help me to do the dishes"

Distracting - "I've not been picked to be on the netball team and all my friend have." "Come and look at what I brought at the shops today and try not to think about it."

Reassuring - "I'm scared of the monsters under my bed." "There's nothing to be scared of."

Praising - "I hate it when she comes into my room." "I'm sure you don't mind because you are such a good big sister."

Everyone falls into one of these traps from time to time, but none of them will get the same results as real listening. Sometimes parents use these communication traps because they have ran out of patience or time and they can be very effective at stopping a child from talking. Listening has the opposite aim, it encourages your child to talk. Encouraging your child to talk will help them to become a confident and effective communicator a skill that will help them for their whole life.

Use active listening skills (see active listening parent tip sheet – Best Practice 3 – 5 years)

Source: Parker, J., & Stimpson, J. (1999). Raising Happy Children. Hodder 7 Stoughton. London.