



"Supporting Parents' Involvement
in the Development and
Education of Their Children"



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They Never Listen to Me!

If you read the title of this article and assumed it was a parent's statement.

Guess again. Our local newspaper asked 100 kids, aged 7 to 17, the question, "What do you wish your parents did differently?" The most common answer? No, it was not more junk food, later curfews or unlimited TV. The most common answer was, "I wish they would listen to me."

What do they mean?

When kids want parents to listen to them, they don't mean listen and judge, or listen and nag or even listen and solve. What they mean is they would like their attention and interest. What they want is a parent who will put down the remote control, the newspaper or the dishtowel and give them a few minutes of eyeball-to-eyeball listening.

Be an available parent.

Being available when your children want you or need you is a powerful expression of love. Too many times parents tell children that they'll talk "later" or "in a minute" and "late" never comes. Typically, when your child wants your attention, and you respond immediately and totally, your child's needs will be met rather quickly. If, however, your child must wait endlessly for your attention, the problem will grow as he waits, or even worse, he'll take his thoughts to someone else, and you'll never know what you've missed.

Listen for the real meaning.

Children aren't always accurate and articulate when they talk. Often, parents need to "read between the lines". Even as teenagers our children sometimes deliver words that are very different from their intended meaning. It's an astute parent who can get past the words being said to the intended meaning. We sometimes find it hard to do this because we get caught up in our child's tone of voice or manner of speaking. Or we make up our minds quickly as we assume the conversation will be a copy of past experiences. It's a smart parent who will try to get beyond simply listening and move toward understanding.

What's the end result?

Several things happen when a parent is doing more listening and understanding. One clear benefit is that your children begin to talk to you about the important things in their lives without fear of judgement or criticism. They become much more honest and open, giving you an opportunity to share your thoughts and values in a nonthreatening environment. In addition, when you begin to see your child with new eyes you'll like what you see, you'll feel more love for your child, and you'll be a happier parent.

The Listening Quiz

At the end of each day, can you answer "YES" to these questions?

- Today my child told me something I didn't know.
- Today I looked into my child's eyes as I listened.
- Today I asked my child a question and then listened to the entire answer without interrupting.
- Today I put down whatever was in my hands to show my child my full attention.
- Today I was available to my child when he/she wanted to talk to me.
- Today, as I listened to my child, I held back at least one unproductive comment.
- Today I asked my child at least one helpful question.
- Today I laughed at something my child said.

By Elizabeth Pantley, author of *Kid Cooperation* and *Perfect Parenting*