

How to Talk So Your Children Listen ~ i-Messages

Last week we discussed empathetic listening*. Hopefully you have had a chance to try it out on your child (or anyone else) and have seen the results. Empathetic listening is great for helping someone else with their problem. But what do you do if you have a problem? What do you do if you're starting to feel the inner feelings of annoyance, frustration,

An effective I-Message frequently produces startling outcomes. Children start to become more considerate and understand the impact of their behaviour on others.



resentment? You start feeling tense, experiencing discomfort and not liking what the child (or person) is doing. How do you communicate so that the other will listen?

PASSIVE

Many of us get stuck on this skill mainly because we were brought up to respect our parents and authority figures and quite often had to swallow our feelings. Some of us were never taught how to state our needs and stop people from trampling all over us, even our children and this is where you find the passive parent. Unfortunately the passive parent is still meeting everyone else's needs but their own. Sometimes they forget to even determine their own needs and sometimes they do know but bury them in resentment and fear of losing the love of the child.



AGGRESSIVE

Some of us let that resentment out in an uncontrollable way. This can be very frightening for both parties. The aggressor though, needs to be heard and the only way that seems to work for them is to be very loud about it! This is generally the way they learnt was effective by watching their parents do the same or by snapping one day and getting a positive result. They then are stuck doing the same behaviour to get a result.

So neither of the above ways of parenting are all that effective. In order to be heard by another

All communication is made up of 7% words, 38% tonality (the way we say it) and 55% physiology (our body language). What messages are you sending?

person you have to accurately send the message. In order to send a message that will be heard you need to say it in an effective tone, the right words and our body language that attract the listener (without being aggressive) and is heard correctly.

An "I-Message" is used to express what is happening for the parent when the child behaves in a way that impinges on their needs. An I-msg describes the feelings and the behaviour in neutral terms. There are many nuances to an effective assertive I-msg, (more than can be written here). So to make it easy we will just stick to an basic 3 part I-message. The three parts are:

I feel When.... Because..... (in any order)

When they toys are not cleaned up, I feel really unhappy because that means I will have to do it later.

I feel annoyed when I am interrupted in my conversation because I lose track of what I am hearing and saying.

When you think it is funny not to do something that I asked you to, then I get really frustrated because you are not listening to me.

When you demand that I take you to your friends place the second I walk in the door I feel annoyed because I'm tired from working all day.

Please note the lack of YOU in the messages. You can be used as long as you are not accentuating the negative or not taking ownership of how you feel. An I-msg clearly explains the effect of the behaviour on you. Children will be much more likely to change their unacceptable behaviour if you send an I-msg containing 1) a description of the unacceptable behaviour 2) your feelings about it and 3) the tangible and concrete effect the behaviour has on you using the correct tone, words and body language.

So your Homeplay this week is to identify a moment where your child/teen is having an effect on you and compose and send an effective I-msg. Keep in mind your I-msg does not have to be delivered immediately, there can be a time delay! Press pause if you're really angry, compose and then hit play.



ASSERTIVE

