

There is one tried and true way to have a good relationship with your kids. One word: "LISTEN". That's it. But it's not as easy as it sounds. **Effective listening is an interactive activity in which the parent works diligently at really understanding what the child is saying.** A listening parent uses a variety of skills and techniques that are simple, fairly easy to learn, yet extremely powerful. Becoming a listening parent takes practice and a willingness to abandon old habits.

The best-ever skills for effective listening can be found in the book How to Talk So Kids Will Listen.... The authors give skills that can be used in combination or alone, and are incredibly successful in engaging kid's cooperation and fostering good parent-child interaction. Here they are:

1. **Listen quietly and attentively.** Use your body to convey interest. If you are working on something, put it aside. Turn toward them, look at them. Use head nods and touch. Effective listening includes respectful silence. Hear your child's views fully, **without interrupting.**
2. **Respond with just a word or two.** ("Wow!" or "Hmmm" or "Oh, I see.")  
If you are a "talker", this is a good way to practice limiting your responses. It allows you to show you're paying attention without disrupting the flow of what your child is thinking and saying. Try this skill for two minutes and see what you learn!
3. **Name the feelings.** ("How embarrassing...frustrating....sad..etc") This teaches a "feelings vocabulary" and helps children express themselves. It also lets them know you are trying to understand what they feel, which is HUGE. ( Don't worry about being wrong, what matters is that you are trying!)
4. **Describe the situation.** ("You tried so hard to be her friend!") This helps you clarify your understanding of what is being said. Do not edit, embellish or editorialize on mistakes. **And absolutely no sarcasm. Ever.**
5. **Recognize struggle and effort from their point of view.** ("You tried so hard to catch that ball/get chores done on time/finish your homework" ) Effective listening involves putting your own need to correct, teach, lecture, aside **for a while** and look at the world through your child's eyes.

If you cannot listen at the moment, **make an appointment to listen.** Say something like: "I really want to hear about that but I am up to my gizzard in 'gators---can we talk when I get done?" **KEEP THAT APPOINTMENT!** This can teach kids a reality of life (they cannot be "Number One" every moment), and time management!

If you have something you want your children to hear, they will be more likely to listen if you regularly listen to them. Listening parents **genuinely want to see their child's point of view---** even---and this is the hard part--- **if it doesn't agree with theirs.** Whew! This can be a **big** challenge. Kids listen to and seek the counsel of someone they feel is on their side, even if not always in agreement with their views. Parents who use these skills convey the message that they really want to understand their child's view, and which helps the child feel cherished and understood. A child who feels this way is a lot more likely to be receptive to parental ideas and teachings than a child who feels criticized or misunderstood by their parent.

Put these skills on your refridgerator. Try being a listening parent. I promise, it really does work!