

The Heart Link to Connection

Sandra Strauss

As parents, nurturing our kids through endless expressions and outpourings of love, support, caring and understanding is our #1 priority. Feeling loved is a soothing balm to a child's soul—and what they want and need most from us in large, daily doses. Children gain healthy self-esteem, the critical ingredient for becoming productive, caring, responsible adults, by the nourishing actions of caregivers.

Good communication is the food that feeds a child's spirit. It's the love connector to our kids' hearts—the vehicle that connects and strengthens the precious parent-child bond. The core of responsible parenting is in how and what is communicated to kids that creates feelings of being loved, supported, cared about and understood. Likewise, strained or poor communication takes its toll on hearts, weakening and unraveling that critical connection.

Kids are absorbing both verbal and nonverbal messages all the time. While parents may believe their kids must surely know how much they're loved, sometimes kids may think otherwise—their opinions based upon their perceptions of how and what is said, as well as perhaps what is not.

At the very heart of each of us, parents and children alike, is an unspoken desire for connection. In fact, the word "heart" itself serves as an acronym of what we want from our connections and what results from them—to feel . . .

Heard
Empathy/understood
Approval
Respected
Trusted/Treasured

Children (yes, including teens) crave connection with their parents—feeling they're heard, understood, approved, respected and trusted and treasured. The payback for building authentic connections comes in countless ways—whether it's their ability to handle situations responsibly, genuinely to be able to trust them, gain their cooperation or other sweet fruits of a caregiver's labor of love. When children feel loved and cared about, they view their caregivers positively. They are more willing to respect parental requests more frequently, resulting in fewer hassles, less turmoil and less fighting.

You get greater cooperation from them to follow your rules and observe limits. You receive a lifetime of unexpected surprises from your generous commitments of time, attention, love and support.



Sandra Strauss
The "Charisma Coach"

“There is no such thing as being a perfect parent, all we can do is give our kids the most of our love and attention. Ultimately, how we communicate with them, adds up and makes a difference in our lives and theirs.”

When kids don't have open, caring lines of communication, they're likely to feel angry, resentful, retaliatory—the rotten fruits of disconnection. They'll actively seek support and guidance from peers, discount caregivers recommendations and rules, and are at greater risk for engaging in risk-related behaviors. Disconnection often disintegrates into disobedience, discord and despair.

How can caregivers focus on HEART-based communication? Here are some guidelines in helping build vital connections through good communication—

Heard: Feedback their concerns so they know you've heard them loud and clear. This means summarizing what you've heard them say to shows them you do understand. It lets them know you've listened and their concerns have been heard. It helps them to release anxiety and allows opportunity for kids to expand on their thoughts.

Giving them feedback through paraphrasing focuses on the content of the message rather than the feelings expressed. It reflects your understanding of the message and if you received it as intended. Use phrases such as:

You think (or you mean) . . .

What I hear you saying . . .

In other words . . .

From your perspective

Empathy: is seeking to understand your child from his/her viewpoint. It's attempting to think and feel “with” them, to become sensitive to how they see a situation, and that show you understand. the feeling repeated back to them. To communicate with empathy:

- Listen for the feeling being expressed (frustration, disappointment, etc.)
- Check out nonverbal behavior (shaking head, frowning, etc.)
- Observe your child's response and check it out by saying ... Sounds like you're feeling (name the feeling) or “Do you feel . . . ?”

Approval: Kids need to know they're loved no matter what, unconditionally. Learning about the world is a daily test and sometimes mistakes result. They need to know that our love isn't tenuous, dependent on what they do or ever withdrawn because they didn't perform according to our expectations or desires. If kids don't gain approval from caregivers, they're likely to seek it elsewhere in order to feel they're okay. They'll hang with those who give them their stamp of approval.

Respected: Respect is an attitude communicated to others through your voice, choice of words and body language. Everyone should be given an opportunity to express their opinions and find ways to mutually satisfy their needs and desires. Best way to create and keep connection is to avoid criticism and negative value judgments. Express your feelings without denying the dignity and respect of your child. This allows your feelings and opinions to be expressed honestly and effectively for solving problems. If you don't mind their hearts, you're unlikely to get the love and respect you want. We can't expect to gain or maintain their love and respect, if we don't model and extend it to them. Avoid “communication killers”: blaming, name-calling, put-downs, threats, lecturing, nagging, comparisons or trivializing, (“Oh, it can't be that bad!”—never invalidate their feelings.)

Trusted: Trust creates a feeling of security. It's your child knowing without a doubt that you say what you mean and mean what you say. Your actions reflect reliability. For instance, if you say you'll be at your child's game, recital or attend a school event, they know you will. There's no room for doubt because you've always demonstrated that you show up, follow through and can be counted upon. By modeling trust, you're teaching responsibility. Your child knows what it means and his or her integrity depends upon it. When we're experiencing the HEART of good communication, there's no mistaking the power of positive connections. It feels GREAT, another acronym for what's gained by getting to the heart of those needs.

G=Gets problems solved faster

R=Reduces stress and conflict

E=Empowers yourself and your children

A=Allows expression of concerns

T=Trustbuilding and teamwork

If you find yourself off-track from HEART-based communication (and we all will from time to time), just begin again. Don't condemn yourself. Each of us does the best we know each moment. But we must remember to ask ourselves regularly, "Is the way I'm communicating netting good results with my child?"

There is no such thing as being a perfect parent, all we can do is give our kids the most of our love and attention. Ultimately, how we communicate with them, adds up and makes a difference in our lives and theirs.

Every time you use HEART-based communication, you'll be depositing invisible currency in your family "Benefits Plan"—less stress, the opportunity for reaping rewards, bonuses, respect, cooperation and pride. You create a lifelong heart space no one else can fill.

As parents, we've got a long-term role in making critical lifetime connections into the hearts of our children. The strength of that connection is focused on the HEART of GREAT communication.

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