

The Art of Listening

By Diane Trautman

A friend and colleague recently gave me an earful about a certain activity in which we're both engaged. When she finished expressing her frustrations, she apologized for her honesty and offered to back off. I told her that I actually appreciated her remarks, even if I didn't agree with everything she said.

That's not to say that some of the statements didn't hurt, but I knew from experience that it's important to separate the way people say things from the information they are trying to convey. I listened to her words, determined her key points, and discussed what should be done to move forward productively.

Many children (and some adults) are not practiced at filtering comments for content. Their immediate response is to assume a defensive posture. Once that occurs, it's difficult to regain their attention or gain their cooperation. On the other hand, if the comments are balanced — acknowledging strengths, while offering ideas for improvement — we are more likely to listen.

When parents tell me that their children tune them out, I can sympathize. Most of us go through that to some degree with our kids. Part of it may be related to our children's stages of development, but often it is a product of the role we play with them and how well we really listen to them.

In "The Parent's Handbook: Systematic Training for Effective Parenting," authors Don Dinkmeyer and Gary D. McKay explore ways in which parents can build their children's confidence. They also discuss communication styles and strategies, cautioning us to avoid playing "judge" or "commander-in-chief" or "consoler" when conveying information, and encouraging us to practice "reflective listening" when our children want to engage us in conversation.

In reflective listening, we provide "open responses" which acknowledge the child's feelings and invite the child to tell us more. A "closed response" dismisses the child's feelings and has the effect of slamming the door on conversation.

With parent-teacher conferences concluded and mid-year finals approaching, this is a good time to have an open conversation with your son or daughter about their classes. Take a look at their work, discuss the feedback from their teachers and develop a plan to help them prepare for their tests and successfully complete the semester. And if you decide that a tutor could provide that extra boost, call us right away.

For more information, contact StudyPros In-Home Tutoring at (661) 296-9206.