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Communication with Your Elementary Age Child

You send several hundred verbal and non-verbal messages to your children each day. Make those messages valuable.

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In communicating with children of all ages, eye contact and physical contact are important. These should be part of our everyday dealings.

A child whose parents use eye and physical contact will likely be more comfortable with himself and others, be a better communicator, and have better self-esteem.

Eye contact, especially, is a little gesture whose presence or absence can covey big meaning. There's surprisingly little eye contact in many households and when it does exist it's usually negative, such as when the teen is being reprimanded. The more you can make eye contact in a loving way, the more your child will feel nourished.

You send several hundred verbal and non-verbal messages to your children each day. You don't have to say a word to send a message to your child. You can turn off verbal communications, but not the non-verbal ones. *Ninety -three percent of all communication is non-verbal* and parents under stress often withdraw from one another and from their children, and when they do communicate, it tends to be bossy and irritable.

First you listen, and then you talk. Decide that for you the conversation is going to be about listening.

Devote your attention to what your son or daughter is saying because kids are very good at detecting insincerity. Make it clear that you are listening and trying to understand your child's point of view. When your child describes an event, repeat what you think your child has just said. You might say, "It sounds like you're saying…" Don't be too quick with advice. Pat answers imply that the child's problem is too simple and maybe not significant. Listen while the child explores all aspects of the situation. Often, your child will talk himself or herself into the same solution you were eager to offer.

Stress to your child the importance of using positive, affirming language.

Teach your child that his/her language is a reflection of his/her thoughts and attitudes.

Also, that others will form attitudes about us, based in part on what they hear us say.

Try the following activity:
Ask your children to make two columns on a sheet of paper. One column should be labeled "Eagle Talk." And the other column "Chicken Talk."

Have your child list as many positive, encouraging words and phrases as he/she/ can think of in the "Eagle Talk" column. Then have your child list negative words and phrases in the 'Chicken Talk" column. Tell your child that you can't talk like a chicken and soar like an eagle. Post the 'Eagle Talk" list in your child's room and have fun tearing up the list of chicken talk.

Action Ideas:
Communicate unconditional love. Never say, "Mom doesn't like you when you whine. Or "No one loves you, when you act like this." *Separate the*

doer from the deed. Critique specific behaviors, but make certain to reassure your children of your love for them, during and after reprimands.

- *Physically express your love.* A touch is worth a thousand words. There is nothing that signifies value more than a spontaneous hug, an arm around the shoulder, a gentle pat on the back, or a kiss on the cheek.

- *Use frequent and sincere praise.* Praising specific behaviors reinforces those behaviors. Be prompt, praising immediately following a good deed. Base praise on what's possible for each child to achieve and avoid comparing one child to another. Teach your children to accept praise and simply say, 'Thank you."

- *Address the problem, don't lay the blame.* Blame placing wastes time and creates negative results. Move right into the solution: "What do we do now?" Teach your children to ask, 'What do we do now?"

- *Create positive memories of childhood.* A sense of the enduring is important to children. Arrange school and family photos in a personal album. Save selected drawings and school papers. If possible, keep a video family documentary of special outings and family gatherings. This will counter the feeling that we live in a "disposable" society, where everything is superficial and transient.

- *Send your children greeting cards in the mail, or put love notes in their lunch boxes.* Such simple acts of thoughtfulness go a long way toward filling your child's life with lifelong values.

- *Be willing to admit you are wrong and be able to apologize for your own lack of consideration and failings.* Provide a home environment that will enable your child to admit, "I made a mistake."

Denis Waitley is one of America's most respected and beloved authors, keynote lecturers and productivity consultants on high performance human achievement. He has inspired, informed, challenged and entertained audiences for over 25 years from the boardrooms of multi-national corporations to the control rooms of NASA's space program. Denis has been voted business speaker of the year by the Sales and Marketing Executives' Association and by Toastmasters' International and inducted into the International Speakers' Hall of Fame.

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