

# PARENTS LEARN GOOD LISTENING SKILLS

From U.S. Dept. of Education

■(WASHINGTON) Brochures for parents are available from the U.S. Government (see box). Following is one brochure on listening to the child.

## HOW CAN PARENTS MODEL GOOD LISTENING SKILLS? Listen Better, Learn More

By Carl Smith, Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills

In one of the Family Circus cartoon strips, the little girl looks up at her father, reading the newspaper, and says, "Daddy, you have to listen to me with your eyes as well as your ears." That statement says almost all there is to say about listening, whether in personal conversations or in learning in school.

### Do Listening Skills Affect Learning?

Listening is not a school subject like reading and writing. Many of us seem to feel it comes naturally, and as long as we can listen to directions to find the restroom, nothing more need be said. The latest studies reveal that listening is a very large part of school learning and is one of our primary means of interacting with other people on a personal basis. It is estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of students' classroom time is spent listening to the teacher, to other students, or to audio media.

### Can Parents Guide Their Children to Better Listening?

According to research on listening skills, being a good listener means focusing attention on the message and reviewing the important information. Parents can model good listening behavior for their children and advise them on ways to listen as an active learner, pick out highlights of a conversation, and ask relevant questions. Sometimes

it helps to "show" children an active listener is one who looks the speaker in the eye and is willing to turn the television off to make sure the listener is not distracted by outside interference.

### Guidelines for Modeling Good Listening Skills

- Be interested and attentive. Children can tell whether they have a parent's interest and attention by the way the parent replies or does not reply. Forget the telephone and other distractions. Maintain eye contact to show you really are with the child.

- Encourage talking. Some children need an invitation to start talking. You might begin with, "Tell me about your day at school." Children are more likely to share their ideas and feelings when others think them important.

- Listen patiently. People think faster than they speak. With limited vocabulary and experience in talking, children often take longer than adults to find the right word. Listen as though you have plenty of time.

- Hear children out. Avoid cutting children off before they have finished speaking. It is easy to form an opinion or reject children's views before they finish what they have to say. It may be difficult to listen respectfully and not correct misconceptions, but respect their right to have and express their opinions.

- Listen to nonverbal messages. Many messages children send are communicated nonverbally—by tone of voice, facial expressions, energy level, posture, or changes in

behavior patterns. You can often tell more from the way a child says something than from what is said. When a child comes in obviously upset, be sure to find a quiet time then or sometime that day to help explore those feelings.

### Suggestions for Improving Communication with Children

- Be interested. Ask about children's ideas and opinions regularly. If you show your children you really are interested, they will become comfortable about expressing their thoughts to you.

- Avoid dead-end questions. Questions that require a yes or no answer lead a conversation to a dead end. Questions that ask children to explain, describe or share ideas extend the conversation.

- Extend conversation. Try to pick up a piece of your child's conversation. When you use children's own phrasing or terms, you strengthen their confidence in their conversational and verbal skills and reassure them their ideas are being listened to and valued.

- Share your thoughts. Share what you are thinking with your child. Ask your child's opinion of where to rearrange the furniture.

- Observe signs. Watch the child for signs it is time to end a conversation. When a child begins to stare into space, give silly responses, or ask you to repeat several comments, it is probably time to stop the exchange.

- Reflect feelings. A good listener can put themselves in the shoes of others and empathize with the speaker. As a parent, try

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## BROCHURES FOR PARENTS

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■(WASHINGTON) More than two dozen brochures for parents aim to help answer questions such as:

- How can I BE INVOLVED in my child's education?
- How can I help my GIFTED child plan for college?
- How can I improve my child's READING?
- How can I receive FINANCIAL AID for College?
- How can parents find a high-quality PRESCHOOL program?
- How can parents model good LISTENING skills?
- How can we help children learn GEOGRAPHY?
- How important is HOMEWORK?

These and other brochures are available on the "Parent Brochures" homepage at the ACCESS ERIC web site: <http://www.aspensys.com/eric/parent.html>

Paper copies may be ordered by calling 1-800-LET-ERIC; by writing to ACCESS ERIC at 1600 Research Boulevard-MS 5F, Rockville, MD 20850-3172; or by sending an e-mail to: [acceric@inet.ed.gov](mailto:acceric@inet.ed.gov)

Access Eric is the promotional and outreach arm of the U.S. Department of Education's Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system.

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are needed to carry out land transfers and help avoid costly legal boundary disputes.

The Academy will issue a final report on the study, which will be available through the Academy's publications office at (301) 617-7801.

The National Academy of Public Administration is a congressionally chartered, independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization that provides expert advice to government agencies on matters of public administration. The Academy will work with the participating Federal agencies and the American Congress on Surveying and Mapping to carry out the study.