

# **Catholic Mutual...CARES for Kids**

## How to Effectively Communicate with a Child

When communicating with children, it is best to get down to their level, both figuratively and literally. Adults often wrongly implement this advice by unconsciously talking down to children, assuming they understand how a child feels in any given conversation. To become an effective communicator, and a trusted adult a child can turn to in times of need, everyone should focus on these key things:

Listen: This may seem simple, but adults miss the mark constantly. Even when children are half in imagination-world when they are young, they express lots of authentic emotions. Help them understand those feelings and express that you have felt that way before too. Say things like, "It sounds like you're really frustrated." It's so simple, but over time they will learn that you care for them and feel comfortable telling you if someone has hurt them.

Don't Dismiss Their Feelings: Along the same lines, adults need to acknowledge the hurt feelings of children. A child may seem overly emotional to you, but brushing off their feelings suggests to them that they can't go to you for comfort in the future. Remember that you don't have to solve their problems, just acknowledge their feelings, and empathize with them.

Maintain Appropriate Boundaries: Sometimes adults might cross reasonable boundaries, both emotional or physical, in an effort to try and bond with a child. This will only confuse the child and could cause people to question your actions. Ensure all communication with a child is done through proper school/parish procedures.

Speaking Up: Whether in the home, on the field, or in the classroom, practicing speaking up when something is wrong is the best activity to do while children are calm and there is no crisis. This does not have to be a big, rehearsed conversation, it can simply be asking "what if...?" while you are driving or playing at home. Then give them sample sentences to practice speaking out when there is a problem.

*Teach Them Virtues:* False reports are extremely rare, but they do occasionally happen. For young children, their understanding of real vs. imaginary is sometimes intermingled. Instilling in them virtues like honesty can help them start to define the difference. Helping them know that telling the truth, even when it's hard, is honorable. Always take a child's concerns seriously and bring in the proper authorities when needed.

There is no guaranteed way to ensure that a child will come to you in their time of need. Maintaining open lines of communication and trust will allow opportunities for conversations to present themselves. Using the aforementioned methods in your everyday life may make all the difference for a child.