

The Katy Family

TUNE UP

Tips and strategies for Katy families to build stronger, happier, healthier relationships

Written by Lorrie Crow Kimble

More and more often, parents find themselves not able to communicate successfully with their children, which can lead to breakdowns in family relationships. These same parents know it is important to have open communication, but might need a quick check-up. Katy mom Kristie Poldervaart believes that effective family communication is the foundation to having a wonderful relationship with her children. The mom of Sydney, 19, and Shane, 16, Poldervaart says her kids and even their friends know they can call her or her husband Robert anytime, no matter what the situation. “We have told them we won’t judge; we will come pick them up from wherever, get them home safe, let them know we love them, and then discuss punishment, if needed, in the morning,” says Poldervaart.

Family communication is beneficial for all ages of children. In fact, Erica Ortiz, mom to Emery, 1, is just starting to realize the importance of communicating well and has plans to actively interact with her daughter as she gets older, especially when she’s a teen. “I hope that Emery will be open and tell me anything, just as I told my mom everything and still do,” says Ortiz. She and her husband, K.C., already have active communication by talking or texting each other every day while at work, especially anything that has to do with Emery. “We talk constantly,” she says.

Kids who eat at least five meals a week with their family are less likely to have weight problems and are more likely to perform well in school
**Source: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse*



Social Media and Communication

There are those parents who blame the existence of social media for the breakdown of communication with their kids, but Poldervaart says she sees social networking as an advantage. “For example, I will tweet out something, tag Sydney in it, and the next thing you know, she and I are texting or talking on the phone. Since she is in college, it is a little harder to stay connected with her crazy schedule, but you do what you need to do, even if it means texting at 11:30 at night,” she adds.

But can too much screen time be detrimental to healthy family communication? “The answer is it really depends,” Dr. Stephanie Chapman, a psychologist at Texas Children’s Hospital says. “For children under 2, research has shown that ‘too much’ screen time can lead to attention problems, school difficulties, sleep troubles, and obesity. It is recommended that a child under 2 years abstain from all screen time,” she says. Although Ortiz admits that she grew up watching TV often and that Emery will likely follow, she adds, “I don’t want to be one of those moms whose kid has an iPad in her face and is not really socializing.”

Finding the Interaction Breakdown

It is vital for parents and their children to have intentional interaction, according to Dr. Chapman. Communication within a family breaks down for a wide variety of reasons. “Stress about money, time, or a crisis in the family and negative patterns of relating between parent and child are some factors,” she says. “It is easy to forget how little time is left at home once your children enter their teen years. This time is important to establish a connection and trust, as your teen copes with many difficult issues that come with this age and needs your support more than ever.”

Poldervaart uses extracurricular activities to connect with her son. “He is a tennis player, and we will discuss how he played because this is something that he is interested in. I am going to take my time to pay attention,” she says. “As kids get older, they stop asking questions, so parents have to work at finding out what their kids are interested in and start asking questions.”

A Starting Point

When parents or children are stressed, overburdened, or struggling with depression or anxiety, Dr. Chapman says it takes hard work to achieve good communication. “You know there is a problem when what a family has been doing for so long is not effective and the actions are causing a dysfunctional relationship,” says Sonia Surani, LMSW, care coordinator at Westpark Springs Hospital. Westpark Springs Hospital helps its patients with extensive on-site education and support groups. This includes facilitating family involvement through family meals and education. “We engage in active listening and are open,” adds Valerie McGill, MS, LPC-intern for Westpark Springs Hospital.

They often see patients with major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, and substance abuse when there is ineffective communication within the family.

But when family communication does break down, there is help. “When that happens, we try to educate our patients on effective ways to communicate, and we encourage the family to participate in the patient’s treatment,” says McGill. Surani adds, “We help them understand that treatment is not something that is in a vacuum, but needs to be a holistic approach including person, family, and environment.”

The enjoyable part of effective family communication is watching her children evolve. Poldervaart shares, “Talk with your kids, teens, young adults, or even your adult children.” She advises discussing the importance of an education, talking to kids about their future, and asking them what they want to do when they grow up. “We also discuss what happens when people make bad decisions, and we ask their opinions,” she says. “Then children are more than likely going to seek your opinion and continue to communicate with you.” **KM**

LORRIE CROW KIMBLE often forced her sons to communicate with her when they were trapped in the car going to an activity.

Tips for Successful Family Communication

- Give your full attention in conversations
- Listen attentively to whoever is speaking without interrupting
- For every critique, offer three positive pieces of feedback
- Regularly schedule fun activities together
- Limit screen time and encourage family interaction
- Be sure your children keep up with their core responsibilities

Source: Dr. Stephanie Chapman, Ph.D., Texas Children’s Hospital