

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Kids Want to Be Understood – So, Are You *Really* Listening?

By Michelle Wells, Guest Contributor



If your child were to rate **your** listening skills, on a scale of 1-10, how do you think you would do?

Would you get a 5? An 8? Maybe on some days, it's as low as a 3.

If I am being honest with myself, **I know that a perfect 10 is *not* my norm.**

Listening to my kids is definitely something I **want** to be good at, but it doesn't always come easily.

Life is busy and distractions are everywhere.

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

I hate to admit it, but at times, I catch myself – or worse yet, my child catches me – “half-listening” to them.

Since we all have probably been there, let’s take a few moments to look at 3 aspects of **really listening well**.

1) Roadblocks

So, what prevents you from attentive listening?

There might be a few specifics that jump to your mind but here is a list that I think we all fall victim to:

- We multitask often and never give our full attention to just listening
- We take on too many commitments – and allow our children to do the same
- We are tired – most of the time
- We want to control every aspect of their life so we don’t value their input
- We put accomplishment and success before balance
- We compare our kids to others and feel compelled to keep up

These are common roadblocks that get in the way of really hearing what our kids are trying to tell us.

However, there is one that I left out that is probably the biggest culprit of poor listening.

It’s passing judgment.

At any given moment we tend to want to judge the actions and words of our kids.

But the ability to listen WELL includes suspending judgment.

Unfortunately, it is all too easy to make assumptions about a circumstance that our child brings to us. Instead of asking good questions and listening to their response, we focus on our immediate judgment of the scenario and how to “fix it.”

Have you ever been there? I know that I have.

When I respond with judgment it has the opposite effect I want it to have. Instead of encouraging healthy communication and coming to a better understanding of my child, it usually shuts down the exchange.

2) Benefits

So why is it so important to listen to our kids?

The short answer is that it is the easiest way to honor them.

Think about the last time you **really** felt heard. It is a motivating and affirming experience.

Isn't that our job as parents?

By listening to your child, you get to know what's going on. Sometimes you might even learn the story behind the story, which may not always come out in the initial dialog.

Here are some other notable advantages that listening can promote in your parenting:

- Raises your child's self-esteem
- Strengthens the connection you have with them
- Allows you to get to know their personality better
- Helps you to see things from their perspective
- Models healthy communication for them to learn

3) Improvements

Making mistakes is an inevitable part of the parenting journey. **The good news is you have numerous opportunities to make it right every day.**

Maybe listening well is not one of your strengths.

No need to fret because you are in good company. All of us can make improvements when it comes to listening to our children.

Take these measures to help your kids feel heard:

- Stop what you are doing – when it is possible – to be fully engaged in the conversation
- Always give them eye contact

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

- Ask questions that encourage them to continue to share, such as – “tell me more,” “go on,” or “what else?”
- Apologize when you don’t get it right
- Schedule a one-on-one date to declare your intentions of improved listening
- Encourage everyone in the family to practice purposeful listening

Final Thoughts

Sports families in particular experience the hustle-and-bustle atmosphere that can hinder good listening habits.

When schedules are tight, outside demands are numerous, and multiple interactions take place, it is easy to slide into not really listening well to your kids.

Go today and ask your child to rate your listening competence. Brace yourself. You might not like the answer.

Then take the steps to remove any roadblocks, revisit the benefits, and commit to improving your listening ear.

Michelle Wells is a wife to one and a mom to six, with 20 plus years of experience at both. With a love for being active in sports she took her passion for competitive training to the world of triathlons where she rocked the elite age group level for several years. In an effort to share her enthusiasm for a balanced and healthy life she inspires others through personal training and freelance writing.