10 Fun Ways to Teach Children Effective Communication Skills

Communication skills are vital–especially in the information age. Studies show that effective communicators are happier, do better in school, are more successful, and make more money than their less-eloquent counterparts. So how do you teach your children to express themselves better? The FUN way! The best way to teach children anything is to make it fun and involve as many of their five senses as possible. Here is a list of 10 games/activities that will foster effective communication skills in your children.

1. **Play Telephone**. The more the merrier. This old elementary school game is a delightfully fun way to develop your child's listening skills. This game is perfect for any age. Begin with a simpler message for the younger children, and gradually increase the size and complexity as they get older.

2. **Directions to Fun.** Have your older child write out directions from your house to somewhere fun: for example, the ice cream shop. Preferably give the directions to a third party who is unfamiliar with the area, and have him follow the directions precisely. Did you get there? If so, have an ice cream cone! If not, talk about what went wrong in the communication. What could be changed that would help get you there the next time. This is a wonderful exercise to help children from 4th through 12th grade learn to give better directions. But it also is a lesson in itself about communication. In order to effectively communicate what you want, you must learn to say what you mean so that others can fully understand.

3. **Dress for Success.** Go to the store or any other public place dressed in your Sunday best. Notice how you are treated. Next go to the same store or a similar location dressed shabbily or inappropriately for the occasion. (Ex: to a Mercedes dealership in old jeans and a worn out T-shirt) Notice how differently you are treated. This illustrates that nonverbal communication has consequences. You will want to point out that strange person walking on the street and do a little of what I call "brain washing." Paint them a picture of the consequences of the

communication that is sent when people wear skimpy clothes or dress like hoodlums. Tell them what their choice of clothes is saying to the average person . . . to a prospective employer. Give them the facts on how this will impact their lives a year–two years–ten years down the line. Tell them what could happen tomorrow if someone draws a conclusion based on those clothes that puts them in harm's way.

4. **Talk-n-Listen**. Have your child sing Yankee Doodle while another person recites the Pledge of Allegiance. See how long they can go without flubbing it up. If your child can do this too easily, have each one read from a different book. Tell them to each take turns relating what the other had read. This helps illustrate that old saying that God gave us two ears and one mouth in order that we listen twice as much as we talk.

5. **Um Contest.** Have your child talk about a familiar topic. Any topic. For example, his/her favorite activity or book. See how long he/she can keep from uttering "um," "er," "uh," "like," or "ya' know." This develops the child's confidence as well as eloquence. Eliminating these "words" in your child's vocabulary will cause him to focus on becoming more articulate and increasing his vocabulary.

6. **Feed Me Applesauce**. Blindfold someone and have that person feed applesauce to another blindfolded person. Have a third person who is not blindfolded giving the directions to both parties. This teaches students to give directions more effectively.
   NOTE This is messy! Fun, but messy! You will want to make sure that your children are not wearing their good clothes and that this activity takes place on a bare floor and not carpet.
7. **Presentation**. Have your child give a presentation of sorts to a local retirement home. This can include giving a craft demonstration, playing piano for them as in a short recital, singing, or reciting a poem. This teaches your child how to present him/herself. This can be done with children of all ages. The sooner you get your child comfortable talking in public, the better. It will become like second nature to him and he may be able to avoid the biggest fear that most people have: *public speaking*.

Studies show that people who enjoy speaking in public are more successful than those who do not. So get them out there showing off the talents God gave them!

8. **What's Going on in the Picture?** This one is great for the little ones. Have your child tell you what he sees in a picture. Encourage him to describe the scenery, the people, the colors … anything he sees. For older children, have them talk about what they think might have just happened before this scene and what they think will happen after. This gives them practice in formulating ideas in a logical manner that others can easily understand.

9. **Finish a Story**. This one is also very good for different age groups. Kids love stories! You start off a story and have your child finish it. For very young children, you can tell them a nursery rhyme and have them make up an alternate ending or add on to the story. This exercise is great for teaching beginning verbal communication skills.

10. **Impromptu Speech.** This exercise is wonderful for children of all ages. Pick a topic that your child is familiar with or just loves and ask him/her to speak for about 2 minutes on that topic. After a while, have your student graduate to speaking on more difficult topics and/or for longer periods of time. You can start them off by talking about their favorite movies and eventually graduate them to controversial topics like prayer in school.