

How To Communicate With Your Grown Children

Author: Dr. Chuck Lynch

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The average distance between grown children and their parents is 100 miles. Careers account for part of that distance. However, much of that distance, either physically or emotionally, can be attributed to poor communication *between* parents and their grown children. What can a parent do to decrease this relational distance and increase the quality of the relationship?

1. Communicate adult-to-adult All children go through developmental stages from childhood to adulthood. Parents may have failed to acknowledge their kids are now adults even if the grown children do not act like it. It is important for the parents to end their parent-to-child talking patterns and address them as adults. Grown children are to put away their childlike patterns and be adults (I Cor. 13:11). Talking parent-to-child does not encourage maturity in grown children, but adult-to-adult communication does. The parents' task is not to wait until *they* think their kids are grown up, but to talk to them as God does now, adult-to-adult.

2. Respect their feelings, thoughts, and opinions Every opportunity for problem solving between parents and grown children must start with mutual respect. Granting the adult child respect may be a gift they don't deserve. But this is the essence of grace; favoring those who do not deserve it (Rom. 11:16; Eph. 2:8-9). The parent may have to separate the grown child's behavior from his position in Christ, if he is a believer, or if not, the fact that he was created in the image of God. Refuse to degenerate into an angry little child when your offspring acts like a child. Do not return your insult for their insult (I Peter 3:4). Choose rather, to stop communicating in a disrespectful way. It will never cause them to grow up. Disrespect for them never develops respect for you. Acknowledging their feelings, thoughts, or opinions does not mean you agree with them. It means you've heard them and understand where they are coming from.

3. Make requests, not demands As parents you have the same responsibility not to exasperate your grown kids as you did when they were young (Col. 3:21). When addressing other adults, you don't demand, instead you make respectful requests or appeals on an adult-to-adult basis. Demands do not reflect respect. Demands usually reflect an effort by one person to control another and adult children deeply resent this. Ask, "Would it work for you to ...?" This reflects a heart that will "give preference to one another in honor" (Rom. 12:10). True, they should respect you for your position as a parent; that's their responsibility. Yet, parents must earn respect; that's their (parents') responsibility. Often parents have to demand respect because they have failed to earn it. Your task is to role model our Lord's words "whatever you want men (your kids) to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12).

4. Stop using anger to control, to change or to manipulate The ninth fruit of the Holy Spirit is self-control. This includes your anger (Gal. 5:23). It is in God's circle of responsibility to change someone (John 16:8). Grown kids see "red" when they are faced with parents' anger, especially when they view it as their attempt to control, change, or manipulate. They prefer distance from you rather than disrespect from you. Inappropriate anger never produces the righteousness God or you desire (James 1:20).

5. Encourage them often As good or bad as adult children behave, God designed in them a deep need to be encouraged. God values this communication tool so much that He urges it be done daily (Heb. 3:13). Practice "pie praise." Praise them for the one piece of their life that is good. Congratulations, praise and support that replaces criticism and condemnation are guaranteed to have more beneficial results.

6. Listen more, talk less Communicating adult-to-adult achieves a balance of both speaking and listening. Talking is not listening. No adult likes a one-sided conversation. The Apostle James stated it this way, "But let everyone be quick to listen (and understand) and slow to speak," (James 1:19). King Solomon said there is more hope for a fool than for a man (parent) who is quick with his words (Prov. 29:20).

7. Stay focused on one topic at a time Responsible communication includes a conscious effort to avoid jumping from one issue to another. When a second or third topic is brought up, affirm your willingness to discuss it at another specific time, and then return to the present topic. Avoid at all cost injecting their past history into a present situation, especially something that is unrelated to the current topic. This includes no talking over or interrupting them. That is disrespect.

8. Avoid all devaluing patterns These include blame shifting, interrupting, diagnosing, labeling, analyzing, preaching, moralizing, ordering, warning, interrogating, ridiculing, lecturing, and other devaluing statements. The Apostle Paul firmly stated not to permit any corrupt (rotten, putrid) word to proceed out of your mouth "but only that which builds up the listener" which includes the adult child. You may be surprised by their response if you demonstrate respect, remain cool headed, encourage often and focus on listening to understand.

9. Admit you have struggles, too Nothing deepens relationships faster than for parents to acknowledge their own disappointments and frustrations in life. Admit they have made some poor decisions in the past. Acknowledge they still struggle in some areas. The Apostle Paul demonstrated his vulnerability when he told the Corinthian church with whom he spent 18 months that, "I was with you in weakness, in fear and in much trembling" (I Cor. 2:3). They probably never would have known that had he not shared it. Be open for your kids to ask you questions and receive honest answers about past parenting. Be open and honest about your own history with your parents and grandparents. God does not waste history, ours or others'. Your past is the frame around your life. It will help your kids have a deeper appreciation of who you are today.

10. Acknowledge you are fellow pilgrims Nothing opens the door of your kids' hearts for you more than admitting you are a fellow pilgrim and learner just like they are. This levels the playing field from a parent-to-child level to an adult-to-adult level. True, you have a wealth of life experience that they don't have. Admit to them that the more you know, the more you realize how little you know. Understand that's where your kids are; overwhelmed with life. Be transparent with your kids. You don't need to be strong. You need to be appropriately honest. This will open the doors for deeper communication on an adult-to-adult basis.

Dr. Chuck Lynch is the President of Living Foundation Ministries and gave his consent to reproduce this article. You can reach Dr. Lynch at Living Foundation Ministries; 611 RD Mize Road; Blue Springs, MO 64014. 816 229 5000.
lfmlynch@yahoo.com; Lfmttools.org

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Barnabas International P.O. Box 11211 - Rockford, IL 61126-1211 - USA
Phone: 815.395.1335 - Fax: 815.395.1385 - E-mail: barnabas@barnabas.org

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