

Listening to Your Kids

Listening to your kids is a skill many parents may not have, but can easily acquire.

By [Denise Mann](#)

Are you really listening to your kids? And are they listening to you?

They say: "I was just holding these cigarettes for a friend." You say: "YOU ARE GROUNDED FOR LIFE. DON'T YOU KNOW THAT [SMOKING](#) WILL KILL YOU!"

You say: "Don't do drugs. Don't drink alcohol. Don't smoke." Your child hears: *blahblahblah*

Is it possible to avoid these constant disputes and disconnects with your kids? Definitely, experts tell WebMD. You absolutely *can* talk so your kids will listen, and listen so your kids will talk.

But how do you crack the code of youth -- without resorting to "LOL," "BRB," "TTYL," or other irksome -- but popular -- kidisms? Here's what the experts have to say about listening to your kids and getting them to listen to you.

Listen closely.

To start with, listening to your kids makes them more likely to listen to you, experts tell WebMD.

"The most important way to talk so your child will listen is to listen to your child," says New York City psychoanalyst Gail Saltz, MD, author of several books, including *Getting Smart About Your Private Parts*. "If they feel listened to, they are more likely to be able to listen and will feel more understood, have more trust, and be more interested in what you have to

say."

Mark Kopta, PhD, chairman and professor of [psychology](#) at the University of Evansville, in Indiana, agrees. "You are much more likely to get a child to listen to you if first you listen to them," he says. "My golden rule is, 'When you have trouble with a child, listen to them first and then empathize with them.'"

Here's how: "The first thing I would do is listen to the child or teenager, then reflect back how you think they are feeling, and then move into the issue at hand," he advises. For example, if you catch a child with a pack of cigarettes, ask him about it and listen to what he says. Next, encourage your child to talk about his feelings, and reflect the feelings back as accurately as you can.

Perhaps he tried [smoking](#) because his friends were all doing it, or because he wanted to appear older -- two powerful impulses for impressionable [preteens](#) and teens. He may have the cigarettes for a whole host of reasons, so it is important not to jump the gun. Once you have determined what is going on, you will be better able to deal with the situation.