



Dr. Karen Explains...

By Karen Ruskin, PsyD

The Art of Communication

Helping your child to be a skilled communicator takes time, patience, and daily role modeling. Parents must develop the art of communication skills in their interactions both with their child, and with their partner.

Children acutely observe—everyday throughout the day from the moment they are born—the communication pattern and interaction style between their parents. It is in this observation that they learn the art of communication.

Let's take a look at a few key pieces of the husband-wife communication relationship to help parents be more mindful of their adult-adult communication that helps shape their child's ability to communicate. Parents must keep in mind that they are the ultimate role models for their children.

Although there are similarities between men and women in conversation, there are also several key differences. One is that women have a tendency to use many more words in conversation (quantity) than do men.

Another difference is that women have more of a tendency to incorporate touch with their communication style. (The use of touch is a non-verbal form of communication and is just as important as one's verbal use of communication.)

A third difference is that women are typically more emotional and

expressive than men. Body language and all forms of non-verbal communication are significant in communication, whether it is with the same or other gender, and are just as telling as verbal communication. Children learn from their observation of both verbal and non-verbal communication between their parents.

There are several challenges inherent in these three differences between the way men and women communicate. One challenge is that women often report that they feel men lose focus in paying attention to what they are saying. Women's use of more words to express themselves may contribute to this feeling. As a result, a child may observe her mother repeating again and again what she has said to her husband because she may feel he is not listening. This miscommunication often leads to an argument.

Another challenge is that there are increased opportunities for miscommunication and misunderstanding since quantity and quality, as well as physical style, between men and women is like they are speaking different languages.

Without solid and healthy conflict-resolution skills, children not only observe miscommunication but also may learn unhealthy communication resolution skills. Where else would they learn this?

It is vital that husband and wife are mindful of their communication style and increase their skills. Too often the difference in men

and women's emotional expression misdirects the focus of their dialogue on who is or is not expressing and how that affects one another, rather than directs it on what the actual problem at hand may be.

Dr. Karen Ruskin, PsyD, LMFT specializes in solution-focused counseling as a marriage and family therapist. She is the author of the cutting-edge book The 9 Key Techniques for Raising Respectful Children Who Make Responsible Choices, as well as the recently released Dr. Karen's Marriage Manual. She is the regular mental health contributor for FOX 25 News Boston and appeared on The O'Reilly Factor and America Live, and can often be heard on various radio stations. She is the founder and owner of Dr. Karen Ruskin & Associates, Inc.

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