

## ***SAMVEDANA***

### ***Are we really listening to them?***

*Little Aaliya tugged at her mother's sari and said, "Ma, see Ronit has got this beautiful shell for me". Her mom was busy discussing Aaliya's academic and behavioural performance with the class teacher. In fact at that very moment she was also sharing her concern about the fact that Aaliya did not listen to anything she said. A little tug at the saree and the little one's voice could be heard saying again "Ma, you can hear the sound waves coming from the shell". "Aaliya stop it". The mother continued to outpour her feelings to the class teacher and again Aaliya said "Ma..." "You silly girl, can't you see I am talking. Go and play somewhere". The mother retorted and turned to the teacher and said, "Ma'am, now can you understand what my problem is?" The teacher smiled and said, "Ma'am I think you don't understand what the solution is!"*

The situation faced by Aaliya's mom is face by many of us as parents and educators -Lack of listening skills among the children. But the situation above talks of something else –

**ARE WE REALLY LISTENING TO THEM?**

or have their voices become one of the many trying desperately to catch our attention.

Dear parents let's accept one thing. What we will give, we will get back. We give love, we are sure to get back love. We give words which hurt, we get back bitterness. So if we don't listen to them the children will surely not listen to us. Possibly if Aaliya's mother had just kneeled down and listened to the small discovery of her child and then continued with her meeting with the teacher, the little child would have gone off satisfied because she had been heard and listened to.

Our busy lives, daily schedules keep us so stressed out always, that simple activities like listening and sharing are slowly becoming a cumbersome chore for us. We have to appreciate the fact that listening as a skill is extremely important to be developed in our children, because the more they sharpen this skill, the more they increase their receptiveness to new information and discoveries around. They are able to use their judgment properly and then act accordingly. In the class too, the facilitators have to train herself to listen to not only the loud voices but also to the feeble voice coming from a child setting in one corner.

Getting a child to listen can be one of the greatest challenges that a parent has to face early on. Indeed, one method that parents tend to employ is to simply repeat the same instruction over and over again. You might find yourself saying, “*How many times do I have to tell you...?*” This rarely, if ever, helps the child to learn what they have done wrong, because the answer to the question is a number! It has nothing to do with what you wish to communicate to the child!

Indeed, you might have reached the point where you have said the same thing to your child so often that you have forgotten that there may be other ways to get your child to listen to what you is saying. Remember – listening skills begin at home early on. People with poor listening skills are rarely successful in life. This is why it is vital to learn how to train our children to become better listeners.

Of course, it is a lot easier to simply repeat yourself rather than try to find new ways of getting your child to listen. Everyone does it, but the truth is, it is a rather lazy way of teaching listening skills – and not a very effective one, as so many of us know. Thus, it is vital to get creative and change that bad habit. Let us take a look at some of the creative ways we can teach our children to listen to what we are saying.

## **Do you command your child to listen?**

“Stop doing that and listen to me!” This is an angry command that a lot of frustrated parents find themselves shouting at their children. Children like to play, and it is vital for their development as human beings. But often at times, they get so involved in whatever they are doing, that they do not stop when we wish to communicate with them. You might find that there is so much racket created from their toys that you have to shout in order to make yourself heard.

Not only is this counterproductive when it comes to teaching them listening skills, it can also stress you out in an unnecessary fashion. If you want to communicate with your child, go to their room and stand in the doorway until they become aware of your presence.

Do not say anything until they have stopped doing whatever it is they are doing and acknowledged your presence. You will find that it usually will not take them very long to do so. There is no need to command your child to listen to you – your very presence on its own will command their full attention.

Before starting off with whatever it is you wish to communicate, there are things you can do to ensure that they will listen well to

whatever it is you wish to say. This is an important skill to teach children from a young age – after all, everyone can listen, but those who are able to listen well are the ones who grow in to successful adults.

If your child is in the middle of drawing a picture for example, compliment them on how pretty it looks. This will put them in a good mood, and make them more receptive to whatever it is you have to tell them next. Positive reinforcement is key to teaching children how to listen. It also ensures that their reaction will be positive.

### **Do you ask “counting questions”?**

These are questions such as “How many times do you I have to tell you...?” Rather than compelling the child to reflect on what he or she has done wrong, this leads them to try to count the number of times they have been told to do something, thus confusing the issue at hand. Instead of asking them such questions, try to have a conversation with your child about what he or she is doing wrong. Do not be angry or demanding. Try to discuss it in a rational manner that will lead your child towards reflecting on what they have done wrong. This will surely impel them not to make the same mistake in the future.

## Do you “sound like a broken record”?

A lot of parents use this statement when expressing their anger towards their kids. Parents seem to forget that in this digital day and age, most kids do not even know what a broken record is! This confuses them more than anything. It also communicates to the child that something about you is “broken,” which fills their mind with negative impressions. If your child is unmotivated towards performing a specific task, then find creative ways of gaining their interest. Turn it into a game.

1. Teach them how to listen and demonstrate why it is necessary for good communication with others. Make it fun and try a new game: tell them to talk, sit down and be quiet. Talk, sit down and be quiet. Talk, sit down and be quiet. Do it with them with about five seconds in between. Move it to 10 seconds and then 15. Giggles are allowed! It's repetition for this age group that helps them to learn a skill.
2. Make another game out of it using a favourite doll or action figure. Storytelling is one of the very best ways to practice this skill. Let the doll or action figure tell a story. Then let the child practice by holding the item and let them tell a story. When you talk, show them how to pay attention and listen.

When they talk, show them how you are quiet and pay attention. Take turns repeating the story to each other to test their skills -- keep it fun.

3. Read to your child. This interaction teaches how to listen and helps practice the process while ensuring the child has an amusing experience. Before you begin, tell the child that you are going to zip their lips and then pretend to do it. Tell them you are going to lock the zipper and throw away the key. When they want to say something, get the pretend key and unlock the pretend lock and unzip the pretend zipper and then talk. Of course, to be sure that they get it; they will want to zip and lock your mouth and then unlock and unzip it too.
4. Encourage good listening skills by doing some of the following:
  - Establish a purpose for the communication
  - Always have good eye contact by getting down on their level while talking
  - Try to speak about an interesting or favorite topic
  - Try not to stop what is being said for interruptions unless there is a question about it
  - Offer nonverbal and verbal responses
  - Divide listening and talking roles

- Pay close attention to what is being said and offer an opinion on it
- Ask the child to repeat what you have already talked about but do so without drilling
- Don't forget to be attentive when they are talking as well

Start as early as possible. I hope you listening to me ?

**Happy Parenting!**

**Anupama Chand**