

Why Won't You Listen to Me?

4/6/23

Lisa here. I hope you read last week's blog and have been working on curbing conversational one-upmanship. This week I'm talking about a situation that commonly leads to miscommunication- people from different generations working together or trying to resolve a difference of opinion. We've all seen the memes and heard the jokes. You may have even found yourself saying something like, "Well, when I was your age..." to someone younger than you, or something like, "Ok, Boomer" to someone older than you.

This issue came up in two different TV shows that I watched. On both shows, a conflict developed between a slightly older, more experienced individual and a younger, but innovative individual. Both brought something to the table, but neither was able to see the value in the other person's input. Several misunderstandings and outright arguments occurred, which negatively affected the jobs they were doing. What stood out to me the most in both of these episodes was that the individuals involved were relatively close in age (10 years or fewer).



If it's that hard for people who are maybe 10 years apart in age to communicate and value each other's input, how much harder is it for parents and their children where the age gap is even greater? In our work, Sarah and I often talk with parents and children about difficulties relating to each other. A frequent source of frustration for both sides is feeling like the other does not value their input or opinions.

Unfortunately, it seems that the relationship between younger and older generations is more contentious than in the past. Younger people in our culture are less predisposed to listen to older people. That's going to affect how your kids take input from you, particularly as they get older.

Yes, you have a lot of wisdom to share. Your kids will benefit from your knowledge about life and about how the world works. However, *how* you present your wisdom is key. As a parent, you may unintentionally reinforce your child's feeling that you do not value what they bring to the table.



Here's the good news: there is a way to let your kids know that you know things and have life experiences that they could learn from without lecturing or saying, "I told you so."

- Talk about your life experiences during down time rather than when you're trying to teach your child a lesson.
- When your child is telling you something (or just venting) find out if they want advice before you give it. If they do, great. If not, let them vent and figure things out on their own.
- If you're giving advice, make sure your kids know you're not telling them what to do. You are just giving your input, but it's still up to them to decide.
- Clearly differentiate between times you are actually deciding something for them (e.g., enforcing a rule, keeping them safe, etc.) vs. times when you are offering advice or an opinion. This is critical. If there is overlap, then it will feel like you are always telling your kids what to do and not allowing them to make choices for themselves. This is especially true for teens and young adults.
- Increase receptiveness by offering it to your kids. Ask them about their experiences and take their opinions seriously. You don't have to agree but avoid being dismissive or minimizing what they're feeling. (For more tips on this, see last week's blog about conversational one-upmanship.)
- Have a frank conversation with your kids about being intentional about listening to each other (not just them listening to you) and taking one another's experiences and opinions seriously. When your kids know you value their thoughts and their experiences, they are more likely to do the same for you.

Overall, leading by example will help reduce the friction between you and your kids. If you are willing to listen to them, they will be more likely to listen to you. Also, if you are able to approach conversations with your kids without feeling like you have something to prove or that you have to make a point, you will create an environment of mutual respect between you and your kids.