

# COMMUNICATION AND REPAIR TOOLKIT FOR PARENTS WITH ADULT CHILDREN



## Why Must Parents Learn to Communicate Properly With their Adult Children?

Parents often need to learn to communicate properly with their adult children when repair in the relationship is needed for several important reasons:

- 1. Changing Dynamics:** As children grow into adults, the dynamics of the parent-child relationship naturally evolve. Parents may need to adapt their communication style to accommodate the changing roles and expectations between themselves and their adult children.
- 2. Resolving Past Issues:** Miscommunications or unresolved conflicts from the past can strain the parent-child relationship over time. Learning effective communication skills allows parents to address these issues openly and constructively, leading to healing and reconciliation.
- 3. Respect and Boundaries:** Healthy communication fosters mutual respect and understanding between parents and adult children. Parents who communicate effectively demonstrate respect for their children's autonomy and boundaries, which is crucial for maintaining a positive relationship.
- 4. Maintaining Connection:** Effective communication helps parents stay connected with their adult children despite life's changes and challenges. By expressing care, support, and interest through communication, parents can strengthen their bond with their children over time.
- 5. Modeling Behavior:** Parents serve as role models for their adult children, even in communication. By demonstrating healthy communication patterns, parents teach their children valuable skills for navigating relationships in their own lives.
- 6. Resolving Conflict:** Conflict is inevitable in any relationship, including between parents and adult children. Learning to communicate effectively allows parents and adult children to address conflicts calmly and productively, leading to resolution and growth in the relationship.
- 7. Emotional Support:** Effective communication provides a platform for parents and adult children to offer emotional support to each other. When parents communicate openly and empathetically, they create a safe space for their children to express their feelings and concerns.

Overall, learning to communicate properly with adult children is essential for fostering healthy, strong, and enduring relationships built on mutual respect, understanding, and love.

## Breaking this down into bite-sized nuggets.

Identify problem areas and think about how you can move forward. Take the following points and guidelines into account and also *tick the boxes* where you have started working on some of these areas. Also, establish what you still need to work on. With your spouse or partner, you can have a discussion concerning an action plan for moving ahead. I have tried to cover various areas that might need some pointers; there may be some overlaps in some of these areas.

## Taking an overall view

1. Acknowledge that your experiences from the past may be influencing your current reactions and behaviours.
2. Consider how your childhood experiences might affect your relationship with your children. Think about, and take note of what may still be playing a role: unresolved traumas, family dynamics, or significant events that may be contributing to the current conflicts.
3. Identify patterns of behaviour or communication that are causing tensions with your children. Understanding these patterns can empower you to make positive changes in their interactions.
4. Having self-awareness of how your past experiences might be influencing your reactions and perceptions. This can help you take responsibility for your own emotions and responses. We can control our behaviour but not that of others (Choice Theory).
5. Develop healthy coping strategies to manage emotions and reactions. This might include breathing techniques, relaxation exercises, or journaling to process feelings. I have shared breathing and relaxation techniques with you before.
6. Work on improving communication skills. This involves expressing yourself assertively and actively listening to your children without being defensive. (See below pointers on communication).
7. Establish and maintain healthy boundaries with your children. This includes respecting your children's autonomy and choices while also asserting your own needs and limits.
8. Seek support from friends, support groups, or other family members. Having a support network can provide emotional validation and perspective.
9. Family therapy sessions to address the conflicts collectively and collaboratively might be needed.
10. While it's important to understand how past experiences shape your behaviour, focus on the present and work toward building a healthier relationship with your children going forward.

This can guide and support you through this process, but the ultimate decisions and actions will be up to you and your children.

# NOTES FOR REFLECTION OR ACTION

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## Practical tips on working with these relationships

- 1. Self-reflection:** Take time for self-reflection and honestly assess your feelings and behaviours in the context of your childhood experiences. Understanding your own emotions and triggers can lead to more mindful interactions.
- 2. Apologise and communicate openly:** If you recognise past mistakes or unresolved issues from your childhood, you should be willing to apologise and communicate openly with your children. Honest and sincere conversations can foster understanding and healing.
- 3. Choose the right time and place:** Choose an appropriate time and private setting to discuss sensitive topics with your children. Avoid initiating discussions during times of heightened emotions or stress.
- 4. Empathize with your children's perspective:** Put yourself in your children's shoes and try to understand their point of view, even if they disagree. Empathy can foster greater compassion and connection.
- 5. Establish boundaries:** Set healthy boundaries with your children. This includes respecting each other's autonomy and understanding that they are all separate individuals with their own lives and choices.
- 6. Focus on positive interactions:** Focuses on building positive experiences with your children. Engage in activities you both enjoy or find new ways to bond and create happy memories together.
- 7. Practice patience:** Rebuilding relationships takes time and effort. Be patient with yourself and your children as you work through the issues.
- 8. Let go of past resentments:** Try to let go of past resentments and not hold grudges against your children. Forgiveness can be a powerful step towards healing and growth.
- 9. Celebrate progress:** Acknowledge and celebrate any positive changes or breakthroughs in the relationships. Recognising progress, no matter how small, can be a motivation to continue working on the relationship. Even exposing problem areas that need to be dealt with is progress versus things being tolerated just for the sake of peace.
- 10. Active listening:** Practice active listening during conversations with your children. This means giving your children your full attention, acknowledging their feelings, and refraining from interrupting or becoming defensive.



## What is active listening?

Active listening is a communication technique that involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what the speaker is saying. It goes beyond merely hearing the words spoken and requires the listener to engage actively in the conversation. Active listening is a fundamental skill in effective communication and can greatly improve the quality of interactions between individuals.

### Key components of active listening include:

**Paying attention:** Give the speaker your full attention and maintain eye contact. This shows the speaker that you are interested in what they have to say and that they have your undivided attention.

**Withholding judgment:** Avoiding interrupting or forming judgments prematurely. Allow the speaker to express themselves fully before responding.

**Demonstrating empathy:** Trying to understand and empathize with the speaker's feelings, emotions, and perspective. Reflecting back on the emotions you sense the speaker is experiencing can help them feel understood and validated.

**Paraphrasing:** Restating or summarizing what the speaker has said in your own words. This shows that you are actively processing their message and helps to ensure that you understand their points correctly.

**Asking clarifying questions:** Seeking additional information or clarification when needed to better comprehend the speaker's message.

**Using verbal and nonverbal cues:** Providing appropriate verbal responses, such as nodding or using encouraging phrases like "I see," "I understand," or "Tell me more." Nonverbal cues, such as nodding, smiling, and maintaining open body language, also signal your engagement and interest.

**Avoiding distractions:** Minimizing distractions, such as looking at your phone or being preoccupied with other thoughts, during the conversation. Or listening to respond instead of listening to hear.

**Being patient:** Giving the speaker enough time to express themselves fully without rushing them or finishing their sentence.



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## How to assertively and actively listen to your children without being defensive requires practice and patience. Here are some practical pointers to help you develop these skills:

1. Assertiveness involves expressing thoughts and feelings honestly while respecting the rights and boundaries of others.
2. Use "I" statements to express yourself. For example, instead of saying, "You never listen to me," you can say, "I feel unheard when I share my thoughts." When you use "you" statements, it already creates a threat to the person you communicating with. To reflect how it makes **you** feel takes the threat out of the picture.
3. Use the active listening techniques already shared above.
4. Stay focused on the present, the current issue or discussion without bringing up past conflicts. Staying in the present can prevent defensiveness from being triggered.
5. Manage emotions. Recognise your emotional triggers and practice techniques for managing emotions during conversations. Breathing exercises or taking a short break can be helpful when emotions start to rise.
6. Empathy goes a long way. When you try to understand your children's perspectives and emotions, it can foster safety. It can reduce defensiveness and open up the space for more constructive dialogue.
7. Avoid interrupting your children when they are speaking. Allow them to finish expressing themselves before responding.
8. Use "I" statements for listening too. For example, you can say, "I understand that you feel frustrated."
9. Ask for clarification if you are unsure about something your children said. This shows genuine interest in understanding their point of view. Remember that if we listen through our hurt, we might hear what we want to hear instead of what is really being said.
10. Accept feedback gracefully. Recognise that receiving feedback is an opportunity for growth. Thank your children for sharing their thoughts and take the time to reflect on the feedback.
11. Set boundaries if the conversation becomes overwhelming or emotionally charged. You can request to continue the discussion later when you are calmer.
12. Role-play scenarios are also helpful to help you practice assertive communication and active listening in a safe environment. Once you have read this document and have a better picture of how to communicate, you can role-play possible scenarios with your spouse, partner or a friend to help facilitate the process of proper communication.
13. Be patient and compassionate with yourself as you develop these new communication skills. Changing long-standing communication patterns takes time and effort.



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## When children have been hurt by their parents

If you have caused your children pain through past interactions, repairing the relationship will likely require additional sensitivity and effort. Healing from past wounds can be a complex process, but it is possible with patience, empathy, and a willingness to change. Here are some specific tips to address this situation:

- 1. Acknowledge past mistakes:** Take responsibility for any past actions that have caused your children's pain. Acknowledging mistakes and expressing genuine remorse is an essential first step towards healing.
- 2. Offer a sincere apology:** Apologise sincerely to your children. This apology should be heartfelt and specific about the actions that caused pain. Avoid justifying or minimising your actions during this process.
- 3. Validate your children's feelings:** Validate your children's feelings and experiences. Let the children know that their emotions are understood and that you are open to listening without becoming defensive.
- 4. Practice active listening:** You should actively listen and refrain from interrupting or dismissing their feelings. Giving your children a chance to express themselves openly can help them feel heard and valued.
- 5. Show willingness to change:** You should demonstrate a genuine willingness to change your behaviour and actions. Actions often speak louder than words, so consistent efforts to improve and avoid repeating past mistakes are crucial.
- 6. Be patient and respectful:** Healing from past hurts takes time, and you should be patient with your children's emotions and healing process. Avoid pushing for immediate forgiveness or resolution; instead, focus on building trust over time.
- 8. Encourage open communication:** Create an environment where open communication is encouraged. This includes giving children the space to share their feelings and concerns without fear of judgment.
- 9. Set healthy boundaries:** Establish healthy boundaries with your children, ensuring that both parties needs and boundaries are respected.
- 10. Show consistent support:** Demonstrate consistent support and understanding towards your children, especially during difficult times. Show that they are committed to working on the relationship and supporting your children's well-being.
- 11. Continue personal counselling and self-growth:** If you carry unresolved issues from your own past that contributed to the harmful interactions, you need to address and heal these issues.

*Remember that rebuilding trust and healing past wounds can be a gradual process. You should stay committed to personal growth and continuous efforts to improve your relationships with your children. It's important for you to understand that you cannot control your children's feelings or actions, but you can take responsibility for your own behaviour and work towards positive change.*



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# ACTION PLAN

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# REFLECTIVE VERSES

## PROVERBS 12:18

THERE IS ONE WHO SPEAKS RASHLY LIKE THE THRUSTS OF A SWORD, BUT THE TONGUE OF THE WISE BRINGS HEALING.

## JAMES 1:19-20

BUT EVERYONE MUST BE QUICK TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK AND SLOW TO ANGER; FOR THE ANGER OF MAN DOES NOT ACHIEVE THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7

LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND AND IS NOT JEALOUS; LOVE DOES NOT BRAG AND IS NOT ARROGANT, DOES NOT ACT UNBECOMINGLY; IT DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN, IS NOT PROVOKED, DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED, DOES NOT REJOICE IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS.

## PROVERBS 15:1

A GENTLE ANSWER TURNS AWAY WRATH, BUT A HARSH WORD STIRS UP ANGER.

## HEBREWS 12:15

SEE TO IT THAT NO ONE COMES SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD; THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP CAUSES TROUBLE, AND BY IT MANY BE DEFILED.



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