

Communication-Trust and Honesty

By: Benjie Stern

Communicating with our children is a unique art, which is not taught at the OBGYN office. The powerful tool of communication, when used in the way that children can relate to, has the capability to lift the parent-child relationship to great heights. The way we interact with our children potentially determines how often our children will listen to us, how much respect they will have of themselves, and essentially, set the backdrop for the atmosphere of our homes. Additionally, it gives us the opportunity to convey our love for them in the language that they understand. In the upcoming weeks, we will be discussing how to acquire the art of communication with our children. However, before we can discuss the intricate details of communication, we need to first understand the overall foundation that is needed for successful communication.

The parent child relationship encompasses many different emotional components. It is inevitable that there will be great unbelievable stages, as well as stormy and rocky moments. What is the underlining factor that differentiates between the families that are able to get through these stormy moments and the families that get stuck in the storm?

R. Orlowek explains that the underlying factor is based primarily on the quantitative and qualitative investment that each parent has already put into the relationship before the storm passes through. Any athlete knows that the more practice and investment the team puts into preparations for the upcoming game, the stronger the team will be in withstanding the challenging moments, which increases the probability for victory.

Similarly, any relationship that is built on a solid foundation will be much less vulnerable when conflict arises. The leading supplier to the parent-child investment is trust. All married couples would admit that a relationship not built on trust is like building a structure without a foundation. It doesn't matter how much effort goes into the construction of the building, it will eventually fall apart. Hence, every Jewish home is blessed with the title *bayis ne'eman*, 'a home of trustworthiness and truth'. This foundation is for sure true in the parent-child relationship.

Trust is solidified through the feeling of security and a sense of honesty that the child feels from the parent. The security comes from the relationship that the parents have with the child and the marital harmony and relationship the parents have with each other. When a child emotionally trusts the motivations and attitudes that the parent has towards them, the more easily they can deal with any emotional "explosions", and storms which may arise. They will then be quicker to comply to the parents' request, even though they may not understand the reasoning behind the demand.

One way we display our trust is by means of honesty. As parents, we need to think before using the words "I promise." As we discussed, honesty is an integral part of our relationship with our children. When parents must make promises to emphasize that they mean what they say, then they are essentially saying that their "unpromised" word is

not trustworthy. In addition, promises build up unrealistic expectations in children. When a child is “promised” a visit to the zoo, he considers it a commitment that the day will not be rainy, no one will get sick, or dad will not be called for an important meeting. Since life is not without mishaps, however, children come to feel betrayed and convinced that parents cannot be trusted.

I therefore strongly recommend striking the words "I promise" from our vocabulary when speaking with our children. Then, in an unusual situation, "I promise" can make a major impact. Such was the case of a seven year old Ilana who was convinced by her brother that she was adopted. Only after her father, who rarely used the words “I promise”, promised that she was not adopted, did Chaya immediately stop crying uncontrollably. A promise is like antibiotics; use it sparingly, if ever, in order that it be effective in the rare situation where it is appropriate.

Being consistent with our words, demands, and consequences, and creating a trustworthy atmosphere, provides our children with a sense of security and comfort, a necessity for all children. If we are honest with our children at all times, then when we explain danger to them, tell them we love them, tell them they are special and important to us, - they will believe us. The trust and honesty in the relationship will empower our children and teens with the comfort to come to us with any life difficulties, and facilitate their growth to be more confident and secure, so there will be no need for them to turn towards the streets to search for that sense of trust that they desperately yearn for.