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**How to Listen to Your Teenager Without Appearing to Have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)**

**By V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed.**

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**(ADD) by V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed.**

In one of the Family Circus cartoon strips, the little girl looks up at her father, who is reading the newspaper, and says, "Daddy, you have to listen with your eyes as well as your ears." That statement says almost all there is to say about listening. Being a good listener means focusing attention on the message and reviewing the important information.

Listening can be considered an art, as well as a skill, and like other skills, it requires that you exhibit some discipline to be effective. However, in today's world where multitasking is considered essential to surviving in the workplace, it is not uncommon to be talking on the phone while we are reading mail or sending e-mail, and simultaneously conducting hand signals with a co-worker who needs your input about something important.

However, when it comes to communicating with your teenagers, you have to separate yourself from this multitasking communications style, and learn how to focus 100 percent of your time on her when she needs to talk to you. If you do not, she will perceive this distracted behavior as a lack of interest in her.

Thus, during your conversations with your teen, you must ignore your own needs, demonstrate patience, and pay attention to her. Hearing becomes listening only when you pay attention to what is being said, and can contribute to the conversation.

So how good are your listening skills?

Answer the following "yes or no" statements honestly:

1. I make assumptions about my teens feelings and thoughts
2. I bring up past issues during current disagreements
3. I interrupt my teenager's conversation
4. I respond to a complaint with a complaint

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5. I respond to my teen with phrases like, "That's ridiculous."

If you answered "yes" to any of these statements, then there is some room for improvement in your listening skills.

### What to do

Use the following guidelines to help improve your listening skills:

1. Maintain eye contact with your teen during conversations. Good eye contact allows you to keep focused and involved in the conversation.
2. Be interested and attentive. Your teen will sense whether you are interested or not by the way you reply or not reply to her.
3. Focus on "what" your teen is saying and not "how" she is saying it. If she is upset, for example, she may be exhibiting body language that may be distracting.
4. Listen patiently and avoid getting emotionally involved in the conversation. If you do so, you will tend to hear what you want to hear, as opposed to what is really being said. Your goal is to remain objective and open-minded during your discussions.
5. Avoid cutting your teenager off while she is speaking. This will show her that you respect her right to have an opinion, as well as to freely express it.
6. Avoid distractions or trying to multitask during your conversations. This may be okay at work, however your teen may perceive that you have a terminal case of Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). :)

### Exercise

It may be helpful to have a practice conversation with your teenager rather than wait to try and be a better listener when she comes to you with a "real world" problem. Inform her that she is really important to you, and that you want to be a better listener. Then tell her that you need her help.

Referring to the above guidelines, have her tell you about her day while you demonstrate your listening skills. Then ask her how you did and what you could have done better. Remember not to get defensive and conclude by thanking her for her help. Doing this on a regular basis will not only improve your overall listening skills, but also will make your teenager want to talk to you.

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V. Michael Santoro, M. Ed. co-authored "Realizing the Power of Love," How a father and teenage daughter became best friends...and you can too, with his teenage daughter Jennifer S. Santoro. For more information, visit their Web site at <http://www.dads-daughters.com>

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Power of Love," How a father and teenage daughter became best friends...and how you can too, with his teenage daughter Jennifer S. Santoro. For more information visit their Web site:  
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### **How ADD Affects Families**

**By Sarah K. Jenkins**

Typically, there is a lot of blame and frustration associated with Attention Deficit Disorder. Depending on how long the problem has gone before being diagnosed, there may be serious mental and emotional scars as family members and the child dealt with issues associated with ADD. This disorder is not only difficult for parents, but also the child with ADD and other siblings in the family.

The obvious victim of ADD is the child it affects. Being accustomed to negativity, these children usually suffer from very low self-esteem. Although they want to behave well, they have impulsive actions that typically result in constant punishment. Parents and teachers of an ADD child often are not aware or do not accept that the child suffers from a disorder and they are not always acting on a conscience level. The child, after being reprimanded and not being able to control their actions, is left feeling as though they will never be adequate or meet everyone else's expectations.

The parents of an ADD child suffer from incredible frustration and doubt of their parenting skills. Often ridiculed by teachers, family members, and other acquaintances, they are often viewed as being the cause of their child's behavior, as though lack of discipline is the root cause of their child's actions. Attention Deficit Disorder sometimes places a strain on the parents' marital relationship as well, as parents blame each other for being overly lenient or harsh in their rearing habits. This can lead to many arguments and disagreements that prove to be difficult on spouses.

An often forgotten casualty of Attention Deficit Disorder is the siblings of a child with ADD. Often not apparent, siblings in this situation often experience similar frustration and anxiety as the parents and child with ADD. Jealousy sometimes plays a factor in their feelings as their sibling requires so much more attention, even if it is negative in nature. Also, these children often get the brunt of their sibling's impulsive actions, including aggressive behavior typical of ADD. These children may also find themselves being categorized in school and other social environments because of their sibling's behavior, which can also have a negative connotation.

In addition to immediate family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins may also be affected when a child has ADD. Depending on the closeness of the family, behavior outbursts and discipline issues may be a factor dealt with on various levels. In extreme cases, ADD may actually cause some familial relationships to be severed.

Sarah is an acclaimed writer on medical matters, and has written extensively on the subjects of Attention Deficit Disorder, Bird Flu and Cohn's Disease. For more of her articles, go to

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