

How to talk so your kids will listen and listen so your kids will talk to you

Hint: it is less about skill and more about relationship

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“My parents always focus on the stuff I do wrong and never see or pay attention to the stuff I do right.”

Real quotes from teens in counseling



“Whatever I do, it is never good
enough.”

Real quotes from teens in counseling



“I really do want to be able to talk to my mom, but she can’t keep a secret. She tells everyone everything.”

Real quotes from teens in counseling



“I can’t talk to my parents about that.
I’m already a burden to them.”

Real quotes from teens in counseling

Warfare Mentality



- ▶ How often do we run across these concept or phrases with parenting:

You need to pick your battles
Everything is a fight
My kid always has to get the last word
I feel like I just can't win
A battle of wills
You are pushing my buttons
You are getting on my last nerve
You are making me angry
We are having a power struggle

Warfare Mentality



- ▶ When we think about our relationship with our kids as a struggle, it predisposes us to respond in that mentality.
- ▶ In war, there are no real winners. There are only damaged and hurt survivors and casualties.
- ▶ In a fight you are determined to win, as a parent, it means that your children have to necessarily be the losers. No one likes to be a loser.
- ▶ It sets things up for future power struggles.

Cooperation Mentality



- ▶ What would you say is the difference between “going against” versus “coming alongside” as a way of being with your child?
- ▶ When we feel like someone is on our side, we are more likely to accept their influence.
- ▶ Even when we disagree, by coming alongside another person, we improve our relationship.
- ▶ Coming alongside our children involves increasing our understanding of their world and inviting them, in appropriate ways, to understand ours.

Cooperation Mentality



- ▶ Seek first to understand, then be understood.
- Covey (Habit 5)
- ▶ So we begin to see that effective communication is predicated on healthy relationship.
- ▶ How can we work on building relationship AND engaging in effective communication at the same time?

Paraphrasing



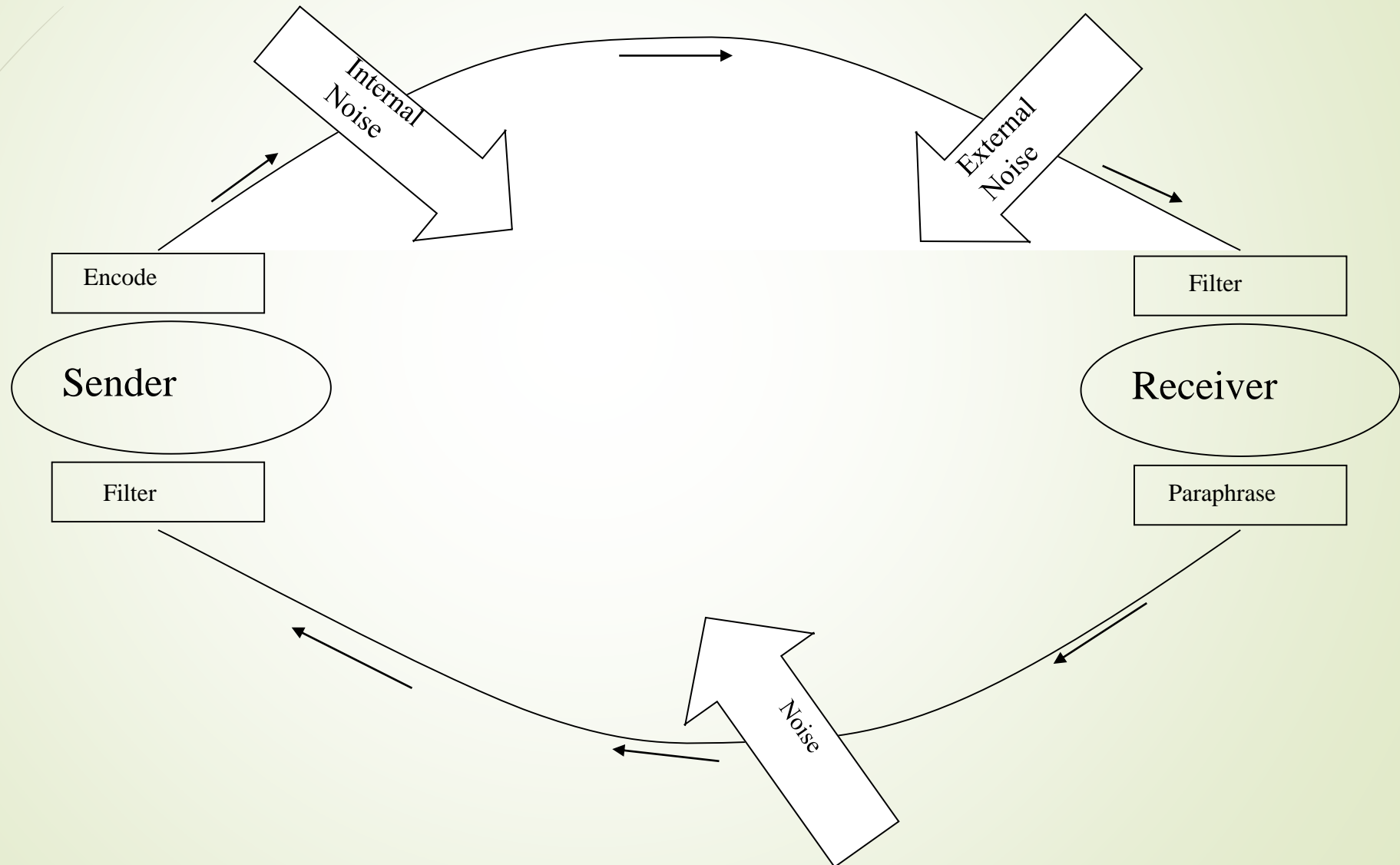
The Power of Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing is a powerful communication skill because it functions on several different levels

First, when done skillfully, it improves clarity.

Next, it has the power to build relationship.

Model for Effective Communication





Paraphrase

- ▶ This is a skill. Skills can be improved. No matter of skill you have, you can be better at it.
- ▶ Paraphrasing is NOT: repeating what just said to you.
- ▶ Paraphrasing IS: a thoughtful summary restatement of what you heard and understood in your own words.
- ▶ How it works to improve clarity: By re-creating the sender's statement in your own words and then asking if it is accurate, you give the other person an opportunity to confirm your understanding or correct any misunderstanding.
- ▶ How it works to build relationship: The behavior of taking the time and effort to understand, summarize and re-state the information communicates to the other person that **WHAT** was said was **IMPORTANT** to you, and by proxy, the person who said it is important.
- ▶ Basically, our brains understand something like this: What you have to say is important to me, as evidenced by the fact that I took time to process it with my entire brain and then made sure I understood you correctly by saying it back to you in my own words. Therefore, you are important to me.



Paraphrase



- ▶ It only works if you use it.
- ▶ Like any skill, it takes practice to master.
- ▶ Challenge: Practice paraphrasing three times before you respond.
- ▶ If your kids start asking why you keep repeating everything they say... you are just starting to do it enough.
- ▶ Most people listen to respond, not to understand. Don't get caught in this trap.
- ▶ Most people assume they understood the other person and jump directly to a response. Slow down and check for understanding first.



General Communication Skills

- ▶ Attending skills
Non-verbals are important.
 - ▶ Eye contact : ranked as one of the most significant non-verbal cues. Signals attentiveness and sincerity
 - ▶ Body Position: Be aware of your bubble and theirs. Get on their level if you are taller or shorter. Avoid crossing arms or sitting behind any barrier. Lean in.
 - ▶ Tone of voice: how you say something can be as important as what you say.
 - ▶ Volume: This can convey importance (word emphasis).
 - ▶ Avoid talking OVER your teen as it may communicate that you think that what you have to say is more important or valid than what they have to say.



General Communication Skills

- ▶ Open questions vs. Closed questions
 - ▶ “How was your day?” “Fine.”
 - ▶ “Tell me about your best class today.”
 - ▶ “What did you talk about with your friends?” “Stuff.”
 - ▶ “What time do you need to be at the band concert?”



General Communication Skills

- ▶ Reflecting Feelings

- ▶ Similar to paraphrasing, this type of skill involves noticing your child's mood or demeanor and curiously asking whether your observation is accurate.
 - ▶ "I'm just going off your expression, but you seem to be a bit frustrated. Is that right?"
 - ▶ "Correct me if I'm off, but it seems to me like you might be feeling kind of down today."



Communication Mistakes Parents make with Teens

- ▶ Trying to solve their problems.
 - ▶ While most of us mean well and are just trying to help, sometimes we are communicating with this behavior that we don't think our kids are capable of dealing with their own issues. Sometimes they just want us to empathize.
- ▶ Assuming
 - ▶ It is probably accurate that most parents have life experiencing that allow us to jump to the heart of the issue. However, we need to slow down and make sure we have all the pertinent information before responding.
- ▶ Minimizing
 - ▶ Yes, teens are more concerned with their peer relationships than with schoolwork or other priorities. Sometimes as they are trying to share their world with us, we make light of what seem, from our perspective, to be trivial concerns. Compared to adult issues, teen issues seem far less significant. However, to them, it is their world. There is a time for giving perspective, but most of the time, we need to get on their level.



Communication Mistakes Parents make with Teens

- ▶ Telling our teens what to do.
 - ▶ By the age of 5 or so, most children know the major differences between right and wrong and understand what is expected of them. There is a shift needed in how we communicate with them: from **DIRECTING** them what to do to **ASKING** what needs to be done. If we only tell them what to do all the time several things may happen: 1) They may feel bossed around and controlled 2) They may become accustomed to being told and therefore never develop the ability to take initiative 3) They may be justifiably confused when other adults seem to expect them to know what to do and how to handle responsibility because they never had to figure it out before.
- ▶ Dealing with conflict while we are emotionally worked up.
 - ▶ Taking a time out to allow ourselves to get in a place of rationality is not only healthy for us, but it models effective emotional regulation for our kids. When we are emotionally worked up, we are literally less able to think reasonably.



Communication Mistakes Parents make with Teens

- ▶ Communicating with our behavior that we don't really care.
 - ▶ **PUT DOWN YOUR PHONE!** As much as I hear adults complain about how attached kids are to their devices (phones, tablets, computers), I also hear kids complain that their parents are just as absorbed.
 - ▶ We communicate what is valuable and important to us by how we use our time and what we prioritize.
 - ▶ Remember many kids spell love : T-I-M-E



Summary



- ▶ Communicating with our kids is highly dependent on the quality of our relationship. If our relationship is not healthy, our kids are less likely to accept our influence regardless of how right we are.
- ▶ Paraphrasing is an important skill that can both improve our clarity and help us build relationship with our children.
- ▶ If we want better relationships with our children, we should abandon the warfare mentality and work on coming alongside our children. This means that we see them as teachable and correctable when talking to them instead of seeing them as argumentative and combative. How we see them predisposes our responsiveness.