

Do You Babble or Do You Make Sense?



Single parenting is a tough job. Learn how to communicate with your children in a way that displays respect and encourages a strong parent-child relationship.

by Linda Ranson Jacobs

As a single parent, whether you are a dad or a mom, you have a tough job. Life is busy; there are things to do, places to go, people to see and children to raise. There may even be times when things seem to be out of control. It's at these times that single parents tend to repeat themselves when trying to communicate with their children.

You're Talking, but No One's Listening

When talking to your children, do you babble? Now you may be thinking, "What on earth does that mean?" When things are really busy, you may feel lucky to get any words out, let alone wonder if you babble or not. Let me rephrase the above question: do you wonder why your children don't listen to you? Do you feel like you might as well be talking to the wall because that's what it feels like when you talk to your children? This isn't always true, but many times as a single parent you feel the frustration that your kids just aren't paying attention. It could be because you are engaging in the fine art of babbling. I have noticed that single moms tend to screech at the children in a high-pitched voice when they get stressed, and single dads tend to yell with a low rumbling tone echoing in their voice—neither of which is pleasing to a child's ear. Then add in the babbling component and you have a real mutiny on your hands.

Recently I had an experience that got me to wondering, *When I was raising my children by myself, did I babble?* Now that I think about it, I believe I did. Possibly I can spare you from babbling, and in doing that I can spare your children from learning the art of "turning the deaf ear" to you, the parent.

As I went to pour out my heart to the Lord, I felt confident He was listening and I would be able to seek solace for what I thought was my wounded spirit. At the time I thought I was asking for the Lord's help and intervention, but as I read His Word and prayed and as God dealt with me, I realized I was complaining. The Lord taught me a valuable lesson. He took me to Jeremiah 7:4, "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!'" (NIV). This was a little confusing. I looked at my commentary on that verse and read that many times in the Bible a phrase or a word is repeated three times for emphasis; at other times repeating phrases could be considered "vain babbling" (comments from the NIV Study Bible). This reference took me to Matthew 6:7, "And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they think they will be heard because of their many words" (NIV). Oh my goodness, was that what I was doing—vain babbling? Am I like that? Merely repeating myself to hear myself speak or to think I'm making my point clear?

Speaking Purposefully and Respectfully

As I thought about this in regard to parenting, I realized that as parents we don't intend to be talking just to hear ourselves speak. But do our words have real meaning? Think about this scene. You finish a hard day at work, pick up the kids from child care or a babysitter and find out they have not completed their homework. You get home and realize you don't have any food to fix for dinner, and who has the energy to cook anyway? Or you have an infant, toddler or preschooler who doesn't feel good and is tired at the end of the day. The kids' rooms are a mess; the house is in disarray; the little one is crying, and you are frustrated. It may be at this point when you begin babbling. You begin repeating yourself.

Think about these questions:

- Do I measure what needs to be said?
- Do I express myself in words that the children understand?
- Do I get the children's attention before I start talking?

This last question is so important. In other words, do you compete with the TV, the computer, the video games or other distractions? You may need to make a rule that when you are talking, the kids are listening. However, you need to show respect for the children in your household and not interrupt their activity. Give them a warning that you are about to speak. Wait for the commercial or a breaking point in the game to begin your conversation. If you do try the competition route, I can guarantee you will end up babbling.

Modeling Communication Skills

When the children are talking to you, are you really listening? I mean really listening. Or is your mind wandering off to projects at work or what someone said to you or what you have to do before you go to bed that night? Many

children who go through a trauma or crisis become intuitive to the adults in their lives. A divorce, death or the feeling of being left can be a trauma for a child. They feel someone has hurt them, and they may be wondering if others will hurt them. They become intuitive in that they feel what you are feeling, and they become very adept at reading adult body language. They look at your face or your eyes to see if you are really paying attention to what they are saying. If not, they will treat you the same way. They will not pay attention to you when you talk to them. As a parent you are always modeling to your children what they should do. Children will do more of what they see you do than what you tell them to do.

After you get the attention of your children, make your request known using simple phrases or commands. I would encourage you to use commands sparingly, but there will be times when a command should be used. Save these times when safety is the issue or when there is a critical point you are trying to make.

Another suggestion is to be concise and make sure your children understand. Ask questions such as, "What is your understanding of this chore or choice?" Be available to explain if your child doesn't understand. Don't give up too quickly. Offer options or choices. For example, you might say, "We need to get things cleaned up around here. Do you want to start by picking up the living room or washing the dishes?" After the child makes his or her choice, then add, "What is your understanding of 'picking up' the living room?" For my daughter, 'picking up' merely meant picking things up off the floor and piling them on the couch. For my son, 'picking up' meant he picked things up off the floor and put them away. What is your child's understanding?

Take a few minutes to show your children what you want done or how to do it. When you walk along beside your children, you will be building a stronger relationship with them. A suggestion is to get something set the way you want it, such as folding the laundry, and

then take a picture of it. Post the picture near where the children will be folding the clothes.

Being Approachable, Not Judgmental

Many times we think our children know what we want when they really don't know. Or maybe you have shown them a dozen times how to fold the laundry, but hey, they are kids with busy and active minds and they forget. Get in the habit of simply stating what you want and/or pointing to the picture. Keep your words simple and kind.

If you are a single parent because of a divorce, have you ever thought about how confusing it must be for children who have to live in two different households? They may get confused about how things are done at your house. At times some kids even get confused about which house they are in for a moment.

Allow your children to make requests of you. Teach them to ask you or let them know they can depend on you to help them at different times. You may know what they want but teach them to ask you. Isn't that kind of like you and your relationship with God? He already knows your needs; He knows what you are going to ask before you ask; however, we are still to go before Him and make our requests known to Him.

Willing to Change Your Ways

Going back to the reference in Jeremiah, I read the verses in chapter 7 before and after verse 4. After reading these passages several times, I realized that the false prophets were using the phrase "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" to lure the people into trusting them. They used the fact that the temple of the Lord was in their midst, but it had no meaning for them. It was simply vain babbling. Jeremiah explained that the people were to change their ways. They were to hear the Word of the Lord and reform their ways and actions. Is that what God is saying to you today? Read these

passages and see what God is saying to you. Apply these principles to your parenting.

This passage in Jeremiah is a good model for dealing with your own children. If you read verses 7:5-7, you will see that Jeremiah says, "If you . . ." and he lists several things the people are to do. After the "If you" part comes the "then I will . . ." Use this example when dealing with behavior issues with your children. An example might be "**If you** get the dishes done and the kitchen cleaned up before 8:00 p.m., **then** I will fix some popcorn and we can watch your favorite show." Or, "**If you** choose not to do your laundry, **then** you will have to wear dirty clothes all week."

Repeating a phrase three times doesn't necessarily mean vain babbling. Sometimes repeating a phrase was used to glorify God and emphasize His holiness. As I cross-referenced this verse, I went to Isaiah 6:3, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (NIV). As I read this verse, these thoughts came to my mind:

Praise and honor and glory to God—His holiness is beyond my comprehension. He is due all of my praise and my recognition of His incarnate Holiness.

The choice is mine in how I respond to my heavenly Father. I can spend my time babbling to Him, "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." or I can spend it honoring Him, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty . . ."

The same holds true for parenting your children. Will you spend your time babbling to them or will you honor and praise them? Will you parent them like the heavenly Father parents you? I ask you again, "Do you babble or do you make sense?" The choice is yours.

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