

# WellNest Counseling

*Bringing wellness to your nest*



## Week 8: Intentional Conversations

**Rule of Thumb: Use short concise sentence**

Please complete this workbook before your live meeting



Communication can be a tricky thing. Even as adults, after we have had years and years of practice, we still get it wrong a lot of the time. Words have significant power and can influence the emotions that fuel behaviors, whether you are a child or an adult. If you're a Harry Potter fan, you might recall Dumbledore saying, "Words are our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury and remedying it." With that concept in mind, as parents, we want to be conscious of what we say and how we communicate with our kids. As we talk to people, there are the words that we say and then there is the underlying message that is sent and received. For example, when a parent says, "Calm down! We do not speak to each other disrespectfully." The message that is meant to be sent is usually, "Calm down, we value respect and calmness in the face of stress." However, what your child likely interprets is, "I can't handle your big emotions, they don't matter, I am the boss, and you must be nice even when you feel unsafe or unseen." This is not achieving the goal that you are seeking. So, this week, we will spend some time on how to send the message you actually want to send.

The Jai Institute of Parenting explains how when we are in a place of anxiety, fear, or worry, we often fall into power-over or power-under paradigms. This affects how we communicate with our children:

**Power-Over Communication:**

- Blame others
- Shame others
- Criticism of others
- Judgment of others
- Comparison between siblings
- Yelling
- Sarcasm
- Demands
- *"Do what I say"*

**Power-Under Communication:**

- Blame self
- Shame self
- Self-critical
- Self-deprecating
- Compare self to others
- Withdrawn
- Goes silent
- Believe conflict isn't safe
- *"Do whatever you want"*

First, let's reflect on the messages you might have received as a child when communicating with your parents:

1. Did you experience your caregiver expressing their feelings through communication?



2. As a child, did your caregiver take time to understand your experiences, especially when you expressed big emotions?
  
3. Did you feel listened to as a child?
  
4. As a child, what beliefs did you develop about expressing strong or big emotions?
  
5. How has that affected your ability to communicate today?
  
6. How do you feel about recognizing and naming your emotions and then communicating them? Is this easy or difficult?
  
7. Below is a list of negative core beliefs people can hold about speaking up in childhood, as an adult, or sometimes both. Mark the ones that resonate with you:
  - If I speak up, I might risk my physical, emotional, spiritual, or psychological safety.
  - If I speak up, I will be rejected, abandoned, and ostracized by the people I love.
  - I have learned that I am not worthy of speaking up.
  - I have learned not to let others know my feelings because I fear they will use them against me or manipulate me.
  - I worry that I will come off as “better than” if I speak my feelings.
  - I prioritize pleasing others, and communicating my feelings and needs does not matter.
  - I have not learned to connect with myself enough to decide what I truly feel and need.
  - I gave up communicating what I truly feel because I believe no one listens.



When I tell people what I need or feel, people tell me I am bossy, stuck up, or controlling.

Now, how do your experiences and beliefs affect your communication with your child?  
Consider the following:

8. What is your first instinct when your child expresses big emotions? Do you want to fix it, run away, yell?
  
9. What beliefs do you believe your child holds about expressing strong emotions to you?
  
10. What *would you like* (if you don't already) to believe about the following statements:
  - My opinions are:
  
  - My feelings are:
  
  - Having needs is:
  
  - Communicating how I feel and what I think is:
  
  - My child's needs and feelings, even when expressed with big emotions, are:
  
  - Everyone's feelings and needs in our family are:



## Keys to Communication

I want to start challenging you to think about communication with kids in a different way than you have probably been conditioned to. Most of us parents rely on demands to accomplish discipline or parenting goals. However, the problem with demands is that they offer a singular outcome and often put the recipient on the defense immediately. When we demand things from our kids, it leaves no room for them to learn skills like negotiation, collaboration, or problem-solving, all skills a person needs as an adult to successfully communicate in personal and professional life. So, we are going to start throwing demands out the window and changing how we think about communicating with kids, as well as how they are allowed to communicate with us.

Before we get there, there are a couple of concepts I want you to throw out the window along with demands:

- Blaming and accusing  
Ex: "You got paint everywhere on the floor! Why can't you be more careful? Why does every project have to end in a disastrous mess!?"  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Name-calling  
Ex: "Did you wake up with fewer brain cells today? Why on earth would you think it was a good idea to not bring a jacket? How dumb can you get?"  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Threats  
Ex: "If you don't clean your room, you are not going to your friend's birthday party!" As a child, I might feel:
  
- Commands:  
Ex: "Help me get the groceries in the house! Hurry up! Move faster! Stop walking so slow!"  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Lecturing and moralizing  
Ex: "That was not a nice thing to do. You just grabbed the toy out of your brother's hand. How do you think you would feel if someone did that to you? You need to understand why asking is important. It's good manners, we want people to like you..."



What do you think is going to happen if you keep walking around grabbing toys out of your brothers or your friend's hands..."

As a child, I might feel:

- Comparison  
Ex: "Your sister never acted like this."  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Sarcasm  
Ex: You left your book at school? That was a smart thing to do, now you can't do your homework!"  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Shaming  
Ex: "What's wrong with you? Big girls don't cry! Toughen up!"  
As a child, I might feel:
  
- Martyrdom  
Ex: "Stop screaming, oh my gosh, the things I do for you! I'll have a heart attack by the time this is over. Can't you see how this is affecting me?"  
As a child, I might feel:

## Intentional Conversations

So far you have explored your styles of communication, learned about what not to do, and are probably sitting there saying, "Okay... well, what *do* I do? What *can* I say?" I'm so glad you asked. I can't tell you exactly what to say because every situation is a little different. But I can give you steps to follow which will guide how to have an effective and meaningful conversation. So, let's look at those steps:

### 1. Reflect feeling

If you haven't picked up on this pattern yet, that's okay! I always like to start my conversations (with anyone for that matter) with how the other person is feeling. This portrays understanding and connection. When I understand and connect with the other person, I can help them better and have more empathy. When I understand and connect with other people, they feel that and



are more likely to cooperate. Remember the key here is to say the feeling word in the same tone. So, if you are saying the word sad, your tone matches being sad.

Examples:

“You’re feeling frustrated.”

“You are sad.”

“You are disappointed because you really wanted to have chocolate ice cream, but the store ran out.”

“You lied because you were worried about disappointing me, getting in trouble, and missing out on this fun activity.”

## 2. Get consent

Here me out on this one. You’re probably thinking, “I’m the parent, I don’t need to ask if I can talk to my kid.” But here’s the thing, we are all people. And I am 100% sure there have been times when you were not emotionally available to talk about certain topics. Kids are the same way! And if we are seeking cooperation, you are going to have a better chance if they are open to listening to you! So, ask if they are open to talking and state the topic you want to talk about.

Examples:

“I would really like to revisit yesterday’s conflict. Are you open to talking about that now?”

“Sounds like you are struggling with a problem. Are you open to brainstorming some ideas?”

“I see you’re really mad at your brother for taking your Legos, are you open to Mommy helping you or do you want to be mad a little longer?”

## 3. Say what you see

Simply say what you see happening. With no evaluations or criticism. Make no judgments. Just the facts. What is factually going on right now?

Example:

“I see you have 2 B’s and 3 C’s on your report card.”

“I’m noticing you have 10 missing homework assignments in Math.”

“I see you hitting your brother.”

“I see you kicking your blocks over.”

## 4. State how what you see makes you feel

Stick with feeling words when you say “I feel.” Many times, we interchange the word “feel” with “believe”. For example, “I feel like I am not being listened to” is actually “I believe I am not being listened to.” “Not being listened to,” is not a feeling.



Examples:

“I feel worried about your grades because I want you to get into a good high school.”

“I feel concerned that these missing assignments will hurt your grades.”

“I feel worried your brother is hurt.”

“I feel worried you will hurt yourself or our things.”

Below is a list of feeling words that might resonate with you when your needs *are* being met:

Absorbed	Elated	Moved
Adventurous	Enchanted	Optimistic
Affectionate	Encouraged	Overjoyed
Alert	Energetic	Overwhelmed
Alive	Engrossed	Peaceful
Amused	Enthusiastic	Perky
Animate	Expectant	Pleasant
Appreciative	Free	Pleased
Astonished	Friendly	Proud
Blissful	Fulfilled	Quiet
Breathless	Glad	Refreshed
Buoyant	Glorious	Relived
Calm	Glowing	Satisfied
Carefree	Good-humored	Secure
Cheerful	Grateful	Sensitive
Comfortable	Happy	Serene
Complacent	Hopeful	Splendid
Composed	Inspired	Stimulated
Concerned	Intense	Tender
Confident	Interested	Thankful
Content	Intrigued	Thrilled
Cool	Involved	Touched
Curious	Joyous	Trusted
Dazzled	Jubilant	Upbeat
Delighted	Loving	Warmed
Eager	Mellow	Wide-awake
Ecstatic	Merry	Wonderful





Below is a list of feeling words that might resonate with you when your needs *are not met*:

Afraid	Downcast	Mopey
Aggravated	Downhearted	Morose
Agitated	Dull edgy	Mournful
Alarmed	Embarrassed	Nervous
Aloof	Exasperated	Numb
Angry	Fatigued	Overwhelmed
Annoyed	Fearful	Panicky
Anxious	Fidgety	Passive
Apathetic	Forlorn	Perplexed
Apprehensive	Frightened	Pessimistic
Ashamed	Frustrated	Puzzles
Beat	Furious	Rancorous
Bewildered	Gloomy	Reluctant
Blah	Guilty	Repelled
Bitter	Harried	Resentful
Blue	Heavy	Restless
Bored	Helpless	Sad
Brokenhearted	Hesitant	Scared
Cold	Horrible	Sensitive
Concerned	Horrified	Shaky
Confused	Hostile	Shocked
Cool	Hot	Skeptical
Cross	Humdrum	Sleepy
Dejected	Hurt	Sorrowful
Depressed	Impatient	Sorry
Despairing	Indifferent	Surprised
Despondent	Intense	Suspicious
Detached	Irate	Tepid
Disaffected	Irked	Terrified
Disappointed	Irritated	Troubled
Discouraged	Jealous	Uneasy
Disenchanted	Jittery	Unhappy
Disgruntled	Lazy	Unnerved
Disgusted	Leery	Unsteady
Disheartened	Lethargic	Upset
Dismayed	Listless	Uptight
Displeased	Lonely	Withdrawn
Disquieted	Mad	Woeful
Distressed	Mean	Worried
Disturbed	Miserable	Wretched



## 5. States the needs, values, and/or desires

These are the needs, values, or desires that drive your emotions in step 3. Almost always, if we feel a certain way about something it's because a value or need is not getting met (remember nervous system science). It doesn't have to be a huge thing either. It can simply be a small desire that a person doesn't get and is slightly disappointed about. Or it can be a value like kindness that is not being met. This would be a much bigger deal and cause much bigger feelings.

Examples:

"I value kindness and harmony in our house" (if your kids are fighting)

"I wish for you to get into a good college" (if your child's grades are falling)

"I value safety and respect" (if your child hurts someone else)

## 6. Request what you would like to happen

And here we are with the requests, not the demands. Requests encourage collaboration and problem-solving. It also decreases the levels of defensiveness in the conversation. Your child will likely be more open to listening and coming up with a solution if he or she has the opportunity to be part of the solution.

Examples:

"I wonder if you can show your anger by using your words and telling me what happened?"

"Would you be willing to sit down with me and talk about solutions to these missing homework assignments?"

"I wonder if you are open to getting a tutor to help you raise your grades?"

Let's put it all together:

Scene: You've just noticed your child has 10 missing assignments.

1. Reflect feeling: "I see you're worried about me finding out you have so many missing assignments."
2. Get consent: "Are you open to talking about this? Yes? Great!"
3. Say what you see: "I see there are lots of assignments missing."
4. State what you feel: "I feel worried that these missing assignments will lead to you failing the class."
5. State your value: "Grades are important. They can really make a difference in your future."
6. Make a request: "I wonder if you would be open to coming up with a new homework routine together?"



Now you try:

Remember, a lot of this is very much like learning a new language. So, be prepared next time you and your child are in conflict. Think of something that you anticipate coming up or something that has already happened and script out what you would like to say.

*Scene- Describe what is going on:*

*Reflect Feeling:*

*Ask for consent:*

*State what you see:*

*State your feelings about what you see:*

*State the need that is not being met:*

*Make a request:*



This formula can be used in most situations. There are going to be times when you feel as a parent you need to enforce limits and not have time to negotiate. These moments are called non-negotiables. Below is a list of common non-negotiable rules most families have:

No hitting  
Anything regarding safety  
Screen-time rules  
Manners  
Kindness

What are your non-negotiables?

As you go through these next few weeks, we are going to be diving into more ways of making requests for your kids and encouraging collaboration. This week, focus on using this guide to communicate and encourage collaboration with your child. Use the space below to write down any thoughts or questions you have about this week's content or anything moments that pop up over the week that you would like to revisit and reflect on:



References:

Payne, K. J. (2015). *The Soul of Discipline: The Simplicity Parenting Approach to Warm, Firm, and Calm Guidance--from Toddlers to Teens*. Ballantine Books.

Rosenberg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools*

Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2020). *The Power of Showing Up: How Parental Presence Shapes who Our Kids Become and how Their Brains Get Wired*. Scribe Publications.

Siegel, D. J., & Hartzell, M. (2013). *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive: 10th Anniversary Edition*. Penguin Publishing Group.

Schuler, K. (2011). *Jai Institute For Parenting Workbook*.

