

# family



## JERRY CAMMARATA FATHER'S DIARY

### Communicating with your kids

"Speak the speech I pray you . . ." or you will go right to bed without any supper! Oh, don't you know it well. You ask your 5 or 6-year-old child what's wrong and he or she will stare at you for 22½ minutes without saying a word or just responds to your 170 overtures of concern with, "Nothing." Deep down something is brewing. The brew will turn out to be rather inconsequential and possibly even amusing to you, but to your son or daughter, the concern is wearing away at his or her every thought.

As parents, it is our job to foster good communication skills in our children. Their only link between their own thought processes and those of others is their symbol system known as language. Particularly important is to allow your child to be witness to experiences of pleasant and meaningful conversation. Let him or her see warmth and understanding between people. If the child is only exposed to fighting parents or a policeman yelling at a gang of kids on the corner, speech communication may never be perceived as a delightful, enjoyable, gratifying, stimulating and important tool of self satisfaction.

#### Talk, talk, talk

As a parent, find out what your child's interests are and where he or she is at. Use that information as a basis to promote conversation and interaction. It may be important to start out with some physical activities and then gradually encourage speech.

For example, if your son or daughter likes baseball, don't talk about it, play the game. As your game progresses, words will emerge and conversation will become easier.

When your child is speaking, really listen. Look at him or her and show genuine interest. If you can't talk to your child at a particular moment, tell the child you can't, why you can't and let him or her know when you will be able to listen. The truth always has its place.

Yes, you say still doesn't work. Little Jose still has sealed lips. Try another strategy. Instead of asking questions of your child and working through his interests, share some of the things that affect you. In this case, coming home and falling on the living room couch and saying, "Boy I had a bad day at work today." Jose may immediately interject, "Yeah, so did I." Kids like to know that they aren't alone in the way they feel or in what they do. This approach in stimulating conversation may be just the thing.

Certainly, if you are on the road to fostering better communication skills with your child, don't ask questions that can be satisfied with a response of only a yes or no. Ask a question that will require the use of a string of words to express an idea. This will keep your child involved and active in the communication process.

#### Talking styles

There are, after all, different ways of talking to kids, consider the following:

- **Feedback**—After your child



says something to you, repeat what he or she says. Very often when a child gets his or her message played back, an error can be detected and a correction made.

- **Self talk**—Talk to yourself when you are working around the

house, in the garden or in the family car. Through your use of words, the attending ears of your child will be getting language stimulation and when you least expect it, will use all kinds of vocabulary—including the six or seven choice words you use



Communication between parents and children is so important for the growth of the child but also for the parent.

around the house each time you get mad.

- **Parallel talk**—As you are working and playing with your child, talk about what is being done. This will also help the child to connect words with things and actions.

- **Naming and pointing**—When you're in the car, walking in the park or maybe taking the much-anticipated ride on the Staten Island Ferry, be sure to point things out to your child and name them. Moments later ask the child if he or she remembers what those names were. You will be surprised.

- **Fill in the blanks**—This game is fun for the whole sentence is not complete until your child comes up with the word. An example of filling

in the blanks is: you walk with your \_\_\_\_\_. The child may point to his or her feet or say the word. Either way, an answer is being given. Of course, the child may respond by saying "foots." In that case, you applaud his or her efforts and say, "Yes, you walk with your feet." In a way, foots is pretty appropriate. It is, after all, more than one foot. You keep saying feet, however, and learning will occur.

Talking is as simple as ABC. Imagine if Dr. Doolittle could really talk to the animals. If you want more information about helping your child to communicate better, write to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, Md. 20852.