

# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills: Listening

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According to the 21st Century Literacy Summit (2002), effective communication skills are essential for success in today's knowledge-based society. This includes acquiring the interpersonal skills required to read and manage the emotions, motivations, and behaviors of oneself and others during social interactions or in a social-interactive context.



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Many of our patterns of communication are structured and practiced prior to entering formal education. Parents, relatives and caregivers model a variety of communication methods through both spoken and unspoken examples. Through modeling we acquire many of our lifelong communication strategies.

It is imperative as influential adults that we recognize our communication practices and adjust those that may have an adverse affect on our youth. Do as I say, not as I do, has not proven to be successful. If we want to assist our kids in developing positive communication skills we must practice them ourselves.

Listening is a primary aptitude necessary for effective communication. Quality listening involves specific practices that promote listening to understand the message versus listening to respond. When we listen to understand we:

- Give our full attention to the speaker and stay focused on their message.
- Let the speaker finished before we begin to talk. We do not try to finish

their statement or create a response in our mind prior to their conclusion.

- Listen for main ideas or key points in their message.
- Listen with empathy by putting ourselves in their shoes for the moment.
- Ask clarifying questions or paraphrase their message to check for our understanding.
- Provide verbal and nonverbal feedback by looking at the speaker and giving the appropriate voice, facial and body cues which indicate our interest in their message.

The methods we use when responding to a message can have a powerful affect on the success of the exchange as well as future communication with the speaker. It is important when responding that we:

- Avoid dead end yes or no questions by asking the speaker to describe, explain or share ideas that will extend the conversation.
- Avoid bogging down the conversation by asking too many detail questions.
- Do not try to top the speaker's story with one of our own.
- Respond to their statements by using some of their language, phrasing or terms in the response.
- Avoid judgment and lecture when sharing what we are thinking.
- Ask for their reflection and input on the topic.

As adults, we set a powerful example regarding communication practices. How we choose to influence our youth when communicating with them can have a lifelong lasting effect on their future. Don't ever forget, their greatest model may be YOU!