Successful communication starts with listening

Are you a good listener? Listening can actually be more difficult than talking because it requires us to delay expressing our own opinions. In fact, everyone can learn to listen better, and this can help improve relationships. Here are some listening tips.

• Maintain eye contact in a manner that is culturally appropriate for you.
• Show you’re paying close attention by leaning forward and making nonverbal gestures like nodding your head.
• Don’t interrupt even when you disagree or have something to share. Take a moment to pause and consider the other person’s statement.
• Ask questions if you haven’t fully grasped the message.
• Briefly paraphrase the other person’s statement to show your understanding and get clarity. For example, say, “It sounds like you’re saying that _______. Is that right?”

Log on and learn! Look for Relationships on the Magellan member website and click on the Relationships box that appears at the top of the website. You will find tools and information that can help you build stronger ties with the people around you.
Communicating with children at specific ages

One of the most valuable gifts that adults can provide to children is to talk with and listen to them every day. Communicating effectively with your children as they develop through each stage of life will benefit the whole family.

**Infants**
Speak softly and hold them gently. Use a higher pitched voice because babies respond to that. Talk to them about the world around them and how important they are. Respond when they coo and babble—that is their language.

**Toddlers**
Provide names for things that children see or do, and begin to help them label their emotions. For example, “I see it makes you happy when Mommy comes home.” Ask your toddler questions and listen to their answers without interrupting.

**Preschoolers**
Your child probably has a lot to say now. Continue to listen and be responsive to their questions. Respect their feelings when they express them and do not dismiss them as unimportant. Continue to help them learn how to label their feelings.

**School-age children**
The child’s life is taking on more complexity now. Friends are becoming very important to them, so make those friendships a frequent topic of conversation. Talk about what your children like and don’t like. Help them learn to develop empathy towards others.

**Teens**
Continue to show an active interest in your teen’s life. Almost all teens become less communicative, so you may have to creatively initiate conversations. Ask questions and listen carefully as they express themselves before you provide your opinion—which may differ substantially from theirs. Always keep in mind the many physical, psychological and social changes teens are undergoing.

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**How to fix a friendship**

*Take the initiative and meet face-to-face.* If you’ve grown apart, make the first move toward healing. Tell the other person how much you value and miss their friendship and that you would like to talk.

*Apologize regardless of the circumstances.* Even if a prior misunderstanding was not your fault, reach out and extend a heartfelt apology for what went wrong. Doing so without expecting anything in return can help rebuild the friendship.

*Listen to your friend’s viewpoint.* Without interrupting, give them plenty of space to provide their perspective on the issues.

*Create an action plan.* After you have both addressed the relationship challenges, think of ways to avoid such problems in the future and move forward with your friendship.