

Have Your Kids Cracked Your Code?

A dad named Travis was headed to the grocery store with two of his children tagging along. His six-year-old, Alex, asked him, “Dad, how come you always go to two different stores to buy food?”

“I don’t know,” Travis answered.

There was a bit of a pause, and then Alex said, “Katie says that when you say, ‘I don’t know,’ it means you’re not really listening.”

In the same monotone, Travis replied, “Huh? Oh, yeah ... really?”

Travis gave his kids plenty more lackluster, noncommittal answers during that shopping trip.

It wasn’t until later that night he realized what had happened, and it stunned him. His kids had cracked his code! He had grown accustomed to giving his kids instant and easy non-answers that actually meant he wasn’t listening or didn’t want to make the effort to think about an answer. The stunning truth was that Travis relied on the code quite a bit, and his kids knew all about it!

Now, we all know that sometimes a six-year-old—or a sixteen-year-old for that matter—will go on and on about something that doesn’t really matter. It’s just chatter; sometimes it’s nonsense. But you should also know that how we listen conveys much to our children. Caring about what they’re telling us demonstrates that we care for *them*.

So let’s take a moment to do some quick self-diagnosis:

- Are you available to your kids? Do you want to be? How

would your kids answer?

- When you're alone with them—in the car, at bedtime, whenever—do they ask questions? Or have they given up because you're not listening anyway?
- Do they come to you with their child-size problems? Or have they stopped because they know you're too distracted to help?
- Finally, later on, when they have some real challenges in life, will they come to you for wisdom and advice? Or will they simply choose to make those decisions on their own?

I guess that last question is rhetorical, but all four of these should be important reminders for us.

Dad, whatever age your kids are, listening is a skill you need to master right now. I challenge you to focus on every word from every family member for the next week.

Action Points

- Look your kids in the eyes, pay attention to nonverbal cues, and really listen to what they're saying and their tone of voice. (And of course, when necessary, give a thoughtful answer.)
- When your child asks a question, engage him in conversation and keep talking until he learns something from you and you learn something from him.

Have your kids cracked your codes? They are pretty smart, so don't be surprised if they have. Besides, that means they're listening to you. And isn't that what family members do?

What are your secrets to good listening with your kids? Please help other dads by leaving a comment either below or at our Facebook page.

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