Lesson: Teaching Our Kids to Be Positive in Their Communication Online and In Person
BACKGROUND
Children learn communication skills from their parents, teachers, family members, friends, and the media—including social media. It is good for children to learn how to have open communication with people in front of them and those behind a screen. Open communication allows people to express themselves and feel they are being heard. Parents are ultimately in charge of teaching their children healthy communication skills, and how to stay clear of negative communication that can harm them or the people around them.

PREPARATION
• Read through the lesson plan and make sure you understand the objectives and the definitions.

• Look at the activities and determine which activities will work best for you and your child.

• Gather a blindfold (can be an article of clothing or whatever you have lying around), obstacles (can be stacked up books, chairs, etc.), and a finish line (can be an area of the house or yard or ribbon) to use as supplies for activity two.

• Think about the type of communication you model for your children
  ○ Do you have open communication with your child? Does your child come to you with their questions and their concerns? Does your child hear you verbally express gratitude? Is the communication in your home respectful?
OBJECTIVE

- Empower parents with information to help their children learn skills that will help them have honest open communication and develop healthy relationships.

- Teach kids positive communication skills both online and offline, and how to have open communication with you as their parent.

- Start a dialogue with your child that helps them understand why positive communication is important.

LESSON

Learning to communicate in a positive way is beneficial throughout life, especially online. In the digital world that we live in, we are often communicating from behind a screen. If we are not careful our words can easily be taken out of context or misunderstood. It’s important to be able to speak, text, and email others in a way that is kind and thoughtful.

Communication is not only about what we say, but what we don’t say as well. One important aspect of communication is to listen when others are speaking. When we listen carefully to those around us, it allows us to make better decisions and avoid misunderstandings. Listening can also help us develop stronger relationships with those we communicate with because it shows them we care about what they are saying.

Remember when speaking to others or posting online to think before you speak and be clear in your meaning. Avoid being argumentative, rude, or inappropriate when communicating. Parents and children can practice and work on communicating openly and respectfully in their daily interactions with one another.
DISCUSSION
There are four ways to make sure our communication is positive and open.

First, when speaking to others, be kind and polite. Don’t disregard other’s viewpoints and opinions. Speak in a kind and calm tone, and wait your turn to speak; don’t interrupt. Look for opportunities to sincerely compliment others. Make sure you are authentic and real. When appropriate express your gratitude to those around you.

Second, don’t degrade, criticize, gossip, lie, or manipulate those you communicate with. If you degrade someone or criticize them it can humiliate them, and cause them to be very guarded in what they share with you. Do your best to avoid gossiping or talking about others behind their back. Truthful or not, this can be very hurtful. If someone has differences, don’t say anything to make them feel less than. Ask about them and have a good discussion, but always be respectful. Don’t be afraid to ask questions. People are knowledgeable in different areas, and it’s okay to ask them to clarify what they are saying or talking about if you are unsure. Also, be very cautious about trying to trick someone into thinking something is what it isn’t. This is manipulative and dishonest.

Third, when listening to others, be an active listener. The following are ways to actively listen:
- Pay attention to the speaker.
- Don’t think of your response the whole time they are talking.
- Look at the speaker.
- Show you are listening by nodding and making small comments like “uh huh.”
- Smile and use body language that shows you are engaged and interested.

Watch what you are doing with your body when you communicate. Body language speaks volumes, without ever saying a word.
QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CHILD

- What is one way we can speak more clearly with one another?
- Do you understand what open communication is? Do you think we have open communication?
- How can we be better communicators in our family?
- Do we speak kindly to each other in our family? How can we do better?
- Does it make you feel good to say mean words to others?
- Does it make you feel good when others say mean things to you?
- How should we talk to people on social media?
- How can we make sure our meaning is clear in online communication?

QUESTIONS FOR OLDER KIDS

- Do you actively listen to others when they are talking to you?
- In what ways are you good at communicating?
- What type of negative communication do you want to work on getting rid of?
- What do you do when you see a mean comment online?
- What is Cyberbullying? What should you do if you or someone is experiencing cyberbullying?

ACTIVITIES

Activity #1
Have a “date night” with each of your kids. Ask your child to make a list of five dates they would like to have with each parent.

Then, set aside time each week, every couple of weeks, or once a month for your date. Find a day that works for you and your child. It can be something simple and inexpensive like; going for a walk, having a picnic, or
playing a game or it can be a bigger activity like; going to a movie. Do whatever works for your family, and whatever your kid likes to do. It’s a great way to spend time with one another and practice your communication skills.

**Activity #2**  
Play Just Listen!

**Directions**
1. Make a small obstacle course in your backyard or in the house.
2. Choose one or two people (depending on how many people you have) to wear the blindfolds.
3. Place the person or people who are blindfolded at the start of the obstacle course and spin them around four times.
4. Each person will have a teammate who will be their “eyes” and communicate to them how to get through the course.
5. Use good communication skills to get through the obstacle course.
6. Play as many times as desired, and make it more difficult!

**Activity #3**  
Play Telephone!

**Directions**
1. Have everyone sit in a circle.
2. Decide who will make up the word.
3. That person whispers the word into the next person's ear and so on. You are only allowed to say it once.
4. It goes around the circle until the person who made up the word hears it again.
5. See if everyone communicated clearly enough for the word to be the same.
6. Give everyone in the circle a chance to make up a word at least once, maybe twice if the family wants to keep playing!
FOLLOW UP
Continue to have date nights with your kids. Have open communication daily where you ask your children about their day and they listen to you talk about yours. In a couple weeks, see how your communication has improved. Look at the difference in your relationship with them and notice improvements.

RELATED DISCUSSIONS/RESOURCES
All of the following topics can be found in our book *30 Days to a Stronger Child*
  ● Respect
  ● Attention
  ● Gratitude
  ● Empathy
  ● Honesty
  ● And many more!

Four Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship With Your Child This Year
GLOSSARY

Active Listener: One who is attentively engaged in a conversation. Not half-listening or dozing off during the conversation. Not allowing themselves to be distracted by something else.

Authentic: Not false or copied; genuine.

Body Language: A type of communication that is non-verbal, where someone speaks with their body. These can include posture, facial expressions, distance from another person, touching, etc.

Criticizing: Evaluating a person’s traits or actions and saying something about them. Generally it’s mean.

Degrading: Results in a loss of respect and is embarrassing for those being degraded.

Gossiping: Talking about others. Usually in a negative way behind someone’s back.

Inappropriate: Something that is unsuitable for the situation.

Lying: Not being honest or truthful.

Manipulation: When someone tries to control the situation in an unfair way. They try to get their way in anyway that they can.

Open Communication: The continuous communication between people. It allows people to express themselves and feel they are being heard.