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JUN 14 1990

## Helpful Hints On Parent-Child Communication

To communicate effectively, parents need to express accurately to their children their own ideas and feelings as well as to listen to and understand the youngster's thoughts and emotions.

Adolescents, even more than younger children, need someone who will listen. Here are some ideas that may help parents become better listeners:

- Be attentive. Stop what you're doing as soon as you can and give full attention. Focus fully on your child's words, using eyes as well as ears. A youngster may say nothing is wrong when dejected looks tell you differently. So, be sensitive to tone of voice and expression. Ask yourself what your child is trying to tell you.
- Encourage talk. Eye contact, a smile and a nod and one word responses indicate understanding if not agreement. Keep questions brief, open and friendly, but try to avoid "why" questions. Children don't always know all the reasons behind their actions and feelings and open-ended questions won't help.
- Try to empathize. Un-



**Wrong:** Try not to pacify your child by saying, "It's not so bad." This often makes the child feel misunderstood, angry and confused.

derstanding others begins with putting yourself into their shoes. This takes imagination and patience. Try to focus on underlying feelings your youngster may be finding difficult to express.

Listening is one of the most important skills of parenthood. It builds closeness. It also helps young people release pent-up emotions and

**Right:** Listening to your child with respect. Try not to interrupt or push a topic they don't want to discuss.

strengthens their ability to make decisions and solve their own problems.

Two informative booklets on communicating with an adolescent are available free of charge. They are: Helping Youth Decide and Helping Youth Say No. The Helping Youth Decide booklet is also available in Spanish. To receive one or more of these booklets, write to: Responsible Living Program, P.O. Box 1176, Alexandria, Virginia 22313.

TIMN 182845