

Communication Tip No.2: Letting Children Think Things Through

By [Caitlin Bootsma](#)

Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of Communication Tips on how to more effectively communicate with children and build an appropriate relationship of trust based on your role in the child's life.

In our daily lives in our work or ministry or as parents, children probably often come to us with any number of concerns. Sometimes they share about their day, sometimes talk about their joys and their sadnesses and sometimes they come to us for counsel—or sometimes we are the trusted adult to whom they disclose abuse.



Often the easiest response to the more uncomplicated conversations is a generic one, whether that be “that’s so sad!” or “great job!” Yet, as parents and educators, we want to take any opportunity we can to help children become better problem solvers and to grow in virtue—and also to let them know that we will protect them. Occasionally, this guidance comes in the form of telling children directly how to solve their problem, but we must also communicate to the authorities on their behalf. Especially, as children get older, however, there are two other responses that provide support and guidance, while encouraging them to think through things for themselves.

The first is helping the child to brainstorm possible resolutions to problems. If, for example, a child comes to you and tells you that a friend is being left out of social activities, you might respond with a question: “Do you think there is anything you can do help him/her feel more included?” Or, perhaps a teen wants to attend a parish event, but doesn’t have the money. Rather than immediately offering a solution, you might prompt them to consider ways that they could earn money or fundraise. In this way, you are not only helping a child find a solution to an immediate situation, but also helping them to grow in wisdom and prudence.

A second helpful response is to know when to be quiet. There are times when the most effective way you can respond to a child is by listening. This is often the case when children are coming to you primarily to process their emotions. As you listen, occasionally recognizing or affirming their feelings, they hopefully will reach a place where they can consider their situation or challenge more rationally. Additionally, if you find that a child is trying to argue with you, if you see that the conversation isn’t productive, its getting repetitive or you yourself are getting angry, it may be time to take a break from talking.

As educators, parents and caring adults, we teach children not only by giving them instruction, but also by the way in which we listen and encourage them to brainstorm solutions to problems they face.