

# Communication Skills

## Making yourself ready to start the conversation: Guidelines for Parents

- A. Be ready to listen.
- Body language.
  - Tone of voice.
  - Eye contact/Facial expressions.
  - Not interrupting.
  - Neutral emotion -- regulate strong reactions/emotions.
  - Create a conversation based on mutual respect.
    1. Open with something like, "Help me to understand..." and then listen.
    2. Acknowledge you son's or daughter's feelings.
    3. Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- B. Cues that show you are not ready to begin the conversation.
- Overly emotional (angry, tearful, yelling).
  - Not on same page as the other parent.
  - Setting expectations of a resolution.
- C. Regulate your anxiety.
- Deep breathing (from the diaphragm).
  - Know when and where to start the conversation.
    1. Not in the heat of the moment (e.g. if they come home intoxicated) or when emotionally charged.
    2. In a setting that will meet you child's needs (e.g. if you child is uncomfortable with sitting down talking to face to face, recommend going for a drive or talking during a common activity, etc.).
- D. Appropriate follow through.
- Close on a positive note, with a plan to talk again after you have time to process what you have discussed.
  - Talk with the other parent about next steps.
    1. Agree on any new boundaries that need to be set, and what appropriate consequences you agree to and promise to both follow through.
    2. If communication was ineffective, or if it is clear that there is reason to be concerned, seek professional help for you and for your son or daughter. We cannot be expected to "fix" problems that are too emotional or frightening for us. An assessment of your child's challenges may be the best next step.

