

S.U.R.F.

your way to better communication

S

specific

don't be vague, it's easy to ignore or challenge

Be specific about your ask or request, and limit your conversation to one topic versus many at the same time. "I'd like you to apply for 3 jobs this week" is more easily understood than, "I'm tired of you laying around all day - you need to get it together!"

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understanding

offering understanding can reduce their defensiveness

Putting yourself in your child's shoes for a minute and offering some understanding can help drop their defense level. "Yeah, I can see that," or "this must be really hard" can be magical words to help move a conversation in a positive direction

R

responsibility

take partial responsibility

If you share in the problem, your son or daughter is more likely to see you as wanting to solve a problem together rather than blame it on them. This adds an element of collaboration and they start to see you as human, capable of making mistakes like they do. "I could've done that better" breaks down barriers and opens dialog.

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feelings

describe the emotional impact on you

A good rule of thumb is to take the word "you" out of the sentence when trying to have a respectful, productive conversation. If you label your feelings it helps your child know what the real issues is. "You're always late, don't you know your curfew is 11 o'clock!?" is less helpful than, "I worry about what's happening when you're not home by 11."

put it together

a real-world example

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Hey Kyle, you've been home from treatment for 2 weeks now which is so great and **I can imagine it might feel overwhelming to know where to start.**

I realized **I've been nagging you the past few days** about applying for school, I've honestly been pretty stressed out about work and not at my best. It would really **help me not feel so anxious** if you **picked up the application by Friday**

and if you want, I'm happy to help you fill it out this weekend.

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practice, practice, practice

you don't learn to surf in a day

Don't feel overwhelmed by the newness of this communication tool. And don't expect to get it perfect the first time you try it. **Practice on a friend, partner, or someone at work** - wherever there's less emotional tension.

Also, a few very important reminders...

- don't try this when you're tired, hungry, or frazzled. Wait till you're able to compose yourself and your thoughts - you'll be happier with the results!
- Make sure your body language is saying the same thing as your mouth - it matters!
- Be genuine in what you say, kids can sniff out fake-ness!