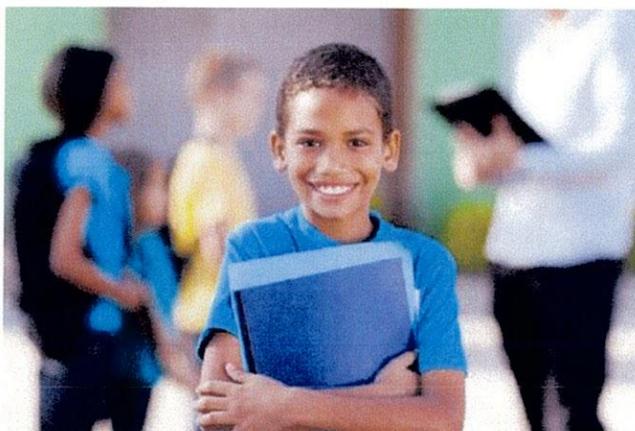


Developing an Elevator Relationship

Communication

Language is also a key part of any relationship. When speaking to a child, it can sometimes seem easier to talk down to him, but part of being a positive role model is to treat children respectfully. By using a full and rich vocabulary, you help develop his language skills without ever opening a book. If a child asks what a particular word means, tell him in simpler language. No vocabulary grows without exposure to new words. It is also important to use a proper tone. A condescending tone will encourage your student to dismiss you as yet another adult. Instead, if you treat your student with respect that will help strengthen your relationship.



Practice Active Listening

One technique for establishing a positive rapport is active listening. To listen actively means to truly focus on the other person who is speaking. All of your attention should be on her words and actions rather than on what you would like to say or do next. Ask a clarifying question, but otherwise do not interrupt her flow. It takes some practice, but it really helps a child feel valued her opinions and ideas.² Further, by acting as a sounding board and providing a model for effective communication, Elevators can help their students better understand, more clearly express and more effectively control their positive and negative emotions.³

Here are some techniques for active listening:

- **Encourage your student to say more** (ie. “Could you tell me more about that?” “How did that make you feel?”)
- **Restate the basic facts/ideas of what you think your student said.** When you are accurate, your student will feel understood. If you are off the mark, it gives your student an opportunity to clarify.
- **Reflect back the feeling** (ie. “You sound pretty frustrated right now.” Or “Sounds like that really hurt your feelings.”)
- **Show understanding.** Put yourself in your student’s shoes and try to understand the world from his or her perspective. Be sympathetic to your student’s needs.

Additional Tips for Active Listening:

- Clear your mind of unnecessary thoughts and distractions so that you can give your student your undivided attention for the time you are with him or her.
- Make eye contact and be aware of body language. For example, crossing your arms may tell your student that you aren’t ready to listen.
- Acknowledge that you are listening by occasionally nodding your head and saying things like “I see” or “Tell me more about that.”
- Validate your student by indicating what he or she has just said makes sense to you and seems reasonable or justifiable. This will generate rapport and encourage your student to provide more information.

² Adapted from *365 Ways to Raise Confident Children* by Sheila Ellison and Barbara Ann Barnett

³ Jean E. Rhodes, *Stand By Me*, Harvard University Press (2002)



Developing an Elevator Relationship

Encouraging Oral Communication

The following are some activities you can initiate to help students develop good communication skills.

- Have a day where you let your student know that you will not speak unless spoken to. Not a word unless he or she speaks first.
- Use toys to act out a situation.
- Share and listen to the three best things and the three worst that happened all week
- Have your student tell you his or her favorite stories, movies, or fairy tales.
- Use a physical object—a pencil, a toy, something they can hold—to demonstrate whose turn it is to speak. When someone has the object, everyone needs to pay attention to that person.
- Ask your student about his or her name. They may not know a lot, but they can speculate.
- Talk about what you remember from when you were your student's age. Ask them what they think the best thing is about their age is, and the worst.

Questioning Skills

Use questions to gather information, begin conversations and to resolve ambiguities. There are two forms of questions: closed and open-ended. Closed questions are those that only require one-word responses, such as "yes" , "no" or "maybe." Closed ended questions limit conversation. Open-ended questions on the other hand require more detailed responses and invite your student to talk to you!

Instead of	Say
Is something bothering you?	You seem upset, what's up?
Did that make you feel sad?	I bet that hurt your feelings, how are you?
Do you like school?	How do you feel about school?
Did you learn anything this week?	Tell me what you learned this week
Do you have a favorite band?	What type of music do you like?

Developing an Elevator Relationship

Compliments

Everyone likes feeling competent, and for a child, positive reinforcement is especially important. Children are often insecure and look for adult validation. If a child does something well, tell him. Some compliments are more effective than others, though. The following are some guidelines for more meaningful compliments:

- **Be sincere.** A fake or false compliment is easy to spot, even for a child.
- **Be generous.** Because young children are often unsure of the opinions of others, verbal praise and confirmation means more to them.
- **Be specific.** Detailed compliments are more memorable than generic ones. They also highlight the current activity. Try to compliment a particular skill, trait, or job.
 - *Okay:* Nice job! That's excellent!
 - *Better:* Wow, you're really smart!
 - *Best:* What a great drawing! You're really artistic.

Problem Solving

Your student will come to you with problems, and you will want give advice. Yet excessive advice is actually counter to character development. Rather than offering a solution, you should strive to model conflict resolution. Helping your student understand on his own what a good solution is develops these skills which will serve them well in life. In general, you consider and suggest the following:

- **Ask questions to clarify the situation.** What exactly happened? Who is involved?
- **Avoid assigning blame.** Remain neutral instead of picking a side.
- **Encourage understanding of both sides of the argument.** How does the other person feel? What does the other person want? What would cause the other person to act that way?
- **Brainstorm various solutions and their effects.** What's a good solution? Is there a way to compromise? What would be fair? What would make different people happy?
- **Help student to pick his own course of action.** What's fair? What works? What does he have the power to change?

Role Modeling

One of the most important things you can do as an Elevator is be a good role model. Qualities that you can intentionally role model include: honesty, integrity, compassion, dependability, high standards and values. Simply seeing the way you treat them and others can have a positive impact the way your student treats others. Teach your student the value of a firm handshake and good eye contact when meeting someone new. Remember that just talking about work and goals teaches children that they can have goals too.

For many lower income and even middle class youth, adult occupations and skills can seem obscure and out of reach. Elevators can serve as concrete examples of career success, demonstrating qualities that students may want to emulate.⁴ Further, if you view your student positively, it can have a profound impact on the way your student views him or herself. An Elevator's positive appraisal and belief in their student's future, can be incorporated into their student's sense of self. If you believe that they can reach the stars they will start to believe that too.

⁴ Jean E. Rhodes, Stand By Me, Harvard University Press (2002)