Keeping bonds strong with young adult kids

By Kathy Peel

Years ago, when my husband and I became parents for the first time, we naively thought that potty training, driver’s ed, first dates and SAT prep courses would be the hard part. We would launch our children into the world and then become empty nesters, eager to reap the rewards of those countless Saturday mornings spent at the soccer field.

But to the surprise of many ready-to-cruise moms and dads, parenting doesn’t stop when and where you think it will. Kids drop out of college. They change their mind about career goals. They can’t find work that will allow them to repay college loans or live independently. Weddings sometimes end in divorce. A lot can happen, and young people have setbacks that have them coming back to you for help and advice.

Parenting styles may need to change

As my four children have grown older, I find that my parenting style has changed. I’ve stopped issuing mandates: “Finish your broccoli.” “Clean up your room.” Instead, I offer low-key counsel: “Now that you’ve taken the safe driving course, it would probably be a good idea to get another estimate for your car insurance.”

“Do you think you should wear a jacket and tie to that interview?”

When my kids need me, I strive to step in without stepping over the line and try to offer support without being suffocating. My instincts guide me fairly well. Recently I got a thank-you for warning my son about a bogus online deal that seemed too good to be true. But I’ve also learned a few lessons the hard way.

Building bridges to communication

Here are some key components that I’ve found helpful in maintaining a good relationship with an adult child.

Patience. Many parents say they are frustrated because their young adults kids don’t listen to them: “They think they know it all.” But didn’t you feel that way when you were in your 20s? And just as you discovered, the day will come when your child will wake up—typically after a difficult or painful experience—and realize that he or she still has a lot to learn.

Trust. Over the years I’ve watched parents who had the kind of relationship with their grown kids that I wanted to have with mine. Their main advice was that a lot of parenting mistakes can be overridden if your children can trust that your love for them is unconditional.

Don’t give kids the idea that your feelings for them are based on what they do or don’t do in specific situations. We can’t afford to send messages like “I love you if you break up with that annoying girlfriend” or “I’ll love you more if you lose some weight.”

Restraint. Don’t feel as if you have to constantly come to a young adult’s rescue. Think of your role less as advising your child as much as listening to him or her. Have
Keeping bonds strong…

Continued from page 1…

a nonjudgmental attitude and a shoulder to lean on when young people need it. The words we use to make our points are also very important.

For example: What young person responds well to the “when I was your age” lecture? Try instead: “I realize that our perspectives are different. Tell me how you see the situation.” Or, instead of “I told you so,” try: “We all make mistakes. The important thing is to learn from them.”

Understanding. This is more difficult said than done, but try to understand their world. Think about what brings you together with your own friends. It’s your shared interests. You don’t agree on everything, but you accept each other’s point of view.

This applies to our relationship with our grown children as well. What are they reading? What music are they listening to? What are they watching on TV? Do you know their friends?

Pay attention to their social media. And from time to time, share some of the good (and not so good) of your own past. It will help them understand who you are—which is often the first step in understanding who they are.

Respect. Granted, some of the things kids do may not invite our respect. But they deserve personal respect and regard for them as valuable people. Always show your respect for a child’s abilities, privacy and independence.

Express disagreements in a way that affirms an adult child’s self-respect: “I hear what you’re saying, but it raises a red flag for me.” Or “Have you ever considered this perspective?”

Appreciation. Tell young people what you like about their generation such as their tech-savviness, their inclusiveness, their healthy emphasis on having a life as well as a career or the importance they place on relationships.

Another way to show appreciation is by communicating with kids on their terms. If they want you to text them on their phone or message them on Facebook, just do it. It’s our job to communicate in ways that make the young people in our lives want to keep in contact, not make them conform to us.

The transitional period

By the time your kids leave home, you hope that they will have internalized a code of ethics and drawn their moral boundaries. Talk to them about the personal guidelines they have set for themselves when they’re on their own.

You may be able to help them clarify their thoughts by describing situations you faced and they might as well: for example, if they are asked to do something unlawful or are tempted to cheat.

Authority issues

Consider, too, when kids move away from home how much sway and say you should still have over their lives. A key question to ask is: “Whose dime is your child living on?” If you are paying for her or his education or helping a young adult financially, you should still have some input.

Parting words

It’s both good and bad news that parenting is never finished. The highs and lows of raising responsible children are all ours to keep for as long as we live. If this truth makes you feel tired, you’re not alone. If it makes you feel elated, you’re in good company, too.

The bottom line is this: We have signed up for one of the most thrilling challenges and exciting adventures life has to offer. Cut yourself—and your kids—plenty of slack and enjoy the process.

Just remember, it’s our job to do all we can to create and maintain good relationships with our adult kids. Family is for life and it’s one of life’s great blessings.

—A version of this article appeared previously in Work & Family Life. It was adapted from the author’s book “Family for Life: How to Have Happy, Healthy Relationships with Your Adult Children” (McGraw-Hill).

When an adult child moves back home

Having a grown kid return home requires some attitude adjusting and, yes, boundary setting. Anticipate changes in the person you raised, in your relationship with her or him, and in how your household functions. Here is some advice to help make the experience better for everyone:

Understand that you didn’t fail as a parent; your child didn’t fail as a person. Let go of any guilt you might be feeling.

Early on establish an exit plan—a time frame you all agree on, and within which you anticipate your child to leave. With a hoped-for plan in place, your son or daughter has a goal to work toward.

Think about how your adult child may be feeling. Be sensitive to his or her job hunt or failed romantic relationship, for example.

A grown child’s return marks the end of order-giving and order-taking as you knew it. You are no longer commander-in-chief.

However, your adult child is not a guest. Respect his or her privacy, but reach an agreement on chores and responsibilities.

Make your expectations about common courtesies clear to your kids such as calling if they will not be home for dinner or to sleep.

Accept that your life will change, but don’t give up your social life to accommodate an adult child.

Adjust your expectations and give the new arrangement time—it may not be ideal immediately.

—Adapted from Under One Roof Again: All Grown Up and (Re)learning to Live Together Happily by Susan Newman, PhD

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Preparing young kids for a coming change

My 3 year old loves his friends at nursery school and is crazy about his teacher. When and how do I tell him that many things are about to change because the school year is almost over and summer is on the way?

—K.L., Seattle

Even good transitions can be hard for young kids. Toddlers, 2s and 3s especially, have very little sense of time. They don’t understand what it means for preschool to end and may become anxious when you talk about school closing and your plans for the summer.

Dr. Tovah Klein, director of the Barnard College Center for Toddler Development and author of How Toddlers Thrive, offers this advice to parents:

**STAY IN THE PRESENT.** Young children live in the here and now. Hold off till the last week of school before you start talking about the school year being over. When you do talk about it, also tell your child one fun thing you will be doing during the summer such as going swimming, visiting cousins or playing outside.

**DON’T FORCE GOODBYES.** Children have their own way of handling them. Some avoid goodbyes, others jump in with enthusiasm. As a way of saying goodbye, you and your child can paint pictures, make cards or purchase small gifts like flower seeds, bubbles or sidewalk chalk to give to teachers and classmates.

**FIND WAYS TO CELEBRATE.** A good way to mark the completion of the school year is to plan a joyful celebration at home or out with friends and family. This marks the occasion for kids in a positive way and helps give them closure. Make an end-of-year cake or have a picnic or play date with friends in a nearby park.

**CREATE A MEMORY LIST** with your child that lets her or him recall all the fun things that happened at school during the year.

Smartphone’s impact on personal relations

Smartphone use is rising rapidly on the list of issues couples fight over, according to a study from Brigham Young University. It’s right up there with sex, money, kids and “I don’t like the way you’re driving.”

A majority of 143 women in the study reported that phones, computers and other digital devices were “significantly disrupting” their family lives and relationships with spouses and partners. Excessive phone use by loved ones—which the researchers refer to as “technoference”—was found to lower overall well-being, increase anxiety and even trigger depression.

Why would someone’s use of a hand-held device trigger such a strong response?

“It can feel a little like being shunned,” according to Guy Winch, PhD, psychologist and author of Emotional First Aid. “The shunned partner is likely to experience such moments as flat-out rejection. And rejection, even in small ways, can be extremely painful. Your brain responds to it the same way it responds to physical pain.”

Dr. Winch suggests ways to address this issue if it’s causing problems in your relationship.

**Assess your technoference.** Once you and your partner are more aware of the issue, you can assess whether and to what extent screen time disrupts your time together.

**Acknowledge the valid need for usage.** Technology has become a necessary and unavoidable part of many people’s jobs, responsibilities or obligations.

**Agree on fair expectations.** Talk with your partner about ways to find a better balance between being responsive to one’s obligations and demands and minimizing the intrusions into your family life and personal relationships.

**Create tech-free zones.** Agree on places such as the dinner table and the bedroom after 9 pm that are tech-device prohibited. Set smartphones or tablets aside so you can spend time together without being interrupted.

**Address possible exceptions.** Problem-solve future hurdles. Consider the issues that might arise and how best to handle them without disrupting what you’re doing with your partner in that moment. For example, if you just remembered a task that you need to handle for work, you could make a note to remind yourself to do it later.

What happens to self-esteem as we age?

A study in Finland that began in 1983—when the participants were 16 years old—offers some answers to that question.

“On average, ratings of self-esteem increased steadily as teenagers grew into full-fledged adults,” says Olli Kiviruusu of the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Helsinki.

Then the growth curve leveled out at around age 32, possibly due to the challenges of work and raising children.

“The 30s and 40s were a busy, at times stressful period for many,” says Kiviruusu. “Perhaps there is less space for areas of personal fulfillment during this period.”

But don’t be discouraged. Past research has shown that self-esteem rises later in life and peaks during the senior years.
Much to gain from visiting our out-of-town relatives

If you have responsibility for an older relative who lives a plane ride or a long drive away from you, there is much to be gained from regular on-site visits—if you have the time and resources.

Chris, a retired writer from Detroit, visits his mother Marilyn in Florida every couple of months. After her husband and Chris’s dad died two years ago, Marilyn moved into an apartment in a retirement community in Port Charlotte.

“My mother is different from a lot of people in her age group,” Chris says. “I just got off the phone with her and she sounds well and happy—although she is having some issues with transportation to and from church.”

**Eyes and ears open**

Chris keeps his eyes and ears open when he visits. “My mother’s mobility and hearing are on the decline, but otherwise she’s doing remarkably well,” he says. “Her apartment is tidy and uncluttered, bills are paid, personal grooming is excellent, she has a positive attitude and she’s still sharp when we play cards and other games.”

Chris has talked with Marilyn about pretty much everything, including her end-of-life choices. “We also had a fruitful meeting with her financial adviser a couple of visits ago,” he says. “And I think the fact that mother gave up driving—with no prompting from me or anyone else—is significant.”

**‘Light of my life’**

Short, frequent visits work best for Chris and Marilyn. “He’s the light of my life and I appreciate the fact that he comes more often,” she says. “We just spent four days together and in two more months, he’ll be back again.”

Because meals and other services are provided in her retirement community, there’s not a lot of planning to do before Chris visits. “We might go out to eat once while he’s here,” Marilyn says, “but mostly we enjoy spending time together. Playing cards, games, watching movies.”

Their arrangement is unique to them, of course, and we all have our own situations to deal with. Just be aware that on-site visits with an older relative, whether they are regular or sporadic, are important—and a lot can be done to make them productive and joyful.

**Things to do before you go**

- **Involve your relative in the planning.** Talk about what you might accomplish while you’re there. Doctor’s appointment to schedule? Storage to go through?
- **Go online.** If you need to set up a new service, do the research and get it started before you arrive so you can make any needed adjustments when you’re on the scene.
- **Reach out.** Share your travel plans with siblings. If your relative has made new friends, this would be a good time to meet them.

**While you are there**

- **Be observant.** Is your relative’s home clean and neat? Is mail being opened and bills paid?
- **Look for signs of change.** They may indicate the need for daily help. Is your relative eating properly? Losing weight? Unpleasant odor? Are friends still coming by? Appointments kept?
- **Have a backup plan.** Problems may arise in your absence. Keep a list of important people in your relative’s life: their phone numbers, email addresses and communication preferences. Do they prefer a text or email message? Share the list with the people on it. Leave a set of your relative’s home keys with a trusted neighbor.

**Stay in touch from home**

- **Be alert to unusual behavior.** For example: phone calls at odd hours or for no apparent reason, repeating information or slurred speech. These may be signs of a new health problem and a reason to consult with a doctor.
- **Establish a routine.** Make sure your older relative is receiving calls regularly. Try rotating calls with other family members. Encourage grandchildren to make a special effort to stay in touch. Ask friends and relatives to send email, newsy notes and photos. And show your appreciation to those who help out with thank-you notes and gifts.
- **Be realistic.** It’s important to know if your relative has a tendency to exaggerate or to underplay her or his problems.

**More resources for long-distance caregivers**

As you make contact with health care providers and agencies by phone or email, be concise. Ask about fees, eligibility and waiting lists. If you are unsure about your older relative’s needs, ask to speak to a case manager or social worker.

- **www.eldercare.gov** Elder Care locator, (800) 677-1116
- **www.caregiveraction.org** The Caregiver Action Network, (202) 454-3970, email info@caregiveraction.org
- **www.nahc.org** National Association for Home Care and Hospice, (202) 547-7424
- **www.caregiver.org** Family Caregiver Alliance, (800) 445-8106
- **www.caremanager.org** National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers, (520) 681-9008
- **www.vnna.org** Visiting Nurse Associations, (888) 866-8773
- **www.socialworkers.org** National Association of Social Workers, (800) 638-8799

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“I promised my sister I’d send her a picture of us.”

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What parents need to know about keeping kids safe

Whatever Michelle took her 3-year-old son to the public library, he liked to walk up and down the aisles, looking at books while she picked out a few for them to read.

Then one day Ben wandered off. “He wasn’t at the coloring table,” Michelle says. “I called his name. Nothing. Panic set in as I sprinted down aisles and checked the bathroom.”

Just then, a woman walked in from outside, holding Ben by the hand. She had found him just as he was about to walk into the parking lot. As Michelle wrapped her son in a bear hug, her mind raced with awful what-ifs.

Have the conversation

Most parents have had the experience of not being able to find their child—in a store, at a theme park, a zoo, a parade, at the beach—or wherever else children can get lost, which is just about everywhere.

Thousands of kids annually become separated from a parent or caregiver for at least an hour, according to the Department of Justice, and countless more are lost for a few scary minutes.

The good news is that the vast majority of lost children are found quickly. Abduction by a stranger or foul play is extremely rare. Even so, parents need to start a conversation—beginning when their kids are young—about what to do if they get lost or become separated from a parent or caregiver.

Offer a dear plan

“Done right, this conversation can empower a child,” says David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. “The key is to be matter-of-fact and calm. Give kids a plan they can understand and follow if they get separated.”

For starters, parents can teach a preschooler: “If we’re in a store or park or anywhere outside of home, always stay where you can see me. But if we ever get separated, don’t go looking for me. Stay where you were when you last saw me. I will always look for you, and that’s where I’ll look first.”

You may even instruct a young child to “sit on the floor or the ground if you can’t find me and yell out my name from there.”

Some kids can disappear very quickly, and most parents know if they have a “runner.” So it’s really important to impress upon these children to stay put if you don’t respond immediately when they call for you.

Have a meeting place

When you arrive with your family at any public location, an important question to ask is: “What’s a good meeting place if we get separated?” Start doing this as soon as kids are cognitively aware of their surroundings, typically by age 4.

By ages 11 or 12, most kids deserve more independence, especially at a place like a museum. If you’re comfortable having them go off on their own, have periodic check-ins. Ask your child: “Where do you want to meet in an hour and a half?”

School-age children

With an older child, you can be more specific and provide more options. For example, as you walk through a store or shopping center, point out to your 5-year-old, “There’s a cashier. There’s a security guard. If you ever get lost, that is a person you could go to.”

To make your lessons really stick, try role-playing different scenarios with your child. “It helps to make the situations you have talked about real for your child,” suggests Nancy McBride, safety director of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (www.missingkids.com). “So when they lose you, they won’t panic. They will know who to go to and what to do.”

Set family safety rules

When it comes to children’s safety, it helps to have some family rules that are non-negotiable. With a young child, for example: “We always wait for the walk sign to turn green. We hold hands when we’re crossing the street and when we’re in a crowded place.”

All young children should also know their full names, their parents’ full names and, if possible, a parent’s phone number.

Older kids need to check in if their plans change—and if, for any reason, they are not where they said they would be. These days, with smartphones, it’s easy to call or text: “I’m leaving the park (or band practice or a friend’s house) now. I’ll be home in 10 minutes.”

Parameters may vary from family to family, depending on a child’s level of maturity, how well he or she knows the neighborhood and the neighborhood itself. And, as much as possible, encourage a buddy system for school-age kids.

Avoid ‘stranger-danger’

The “never talk to strangers” message may be well-intentioned, but it’s not helpful. “It may mistakenly convey that only strangers harm kids,” says Nancy McBride, “and it does not fully educate children about how to stay safer.”

“Kids need to know how to recognize and avoid potentially dangerous situations,” McBride says, “and when it involves child exploitation, adults need to know that risks to children are greater from someone they know.”
Mastering the art of...doing it now

By Rita Emmett

Do you put off doing things that are really important to you? Do you feel anxious or guilty because you just can’t get yourself to do what you know you need or want to do? Is your procrastination driving your family, friends and/or coworkers a little crazy?

Procrastination is a problem for many people. It can take a surprisingly high toll on our lives, causing stress, illness and feelings of low self-esteem. It can also keep us from achieving our goals and fulfilling our dreams.

The many faces of fear

You may not think of yourself as a “perfectionist.” But do you try to put off things until the time or the mood or the conditions are “just right?”

It’s important to realize that “just right” situations almost never happen. So the first step in conquering a procrastination problem is to cultivate the attitude: “I’m just going to do my best and it may not be perfect.”

To conquer other fears that may be causing you to procrastinate—such as the fear of change, fear of success, fear of too much responsibility—ask yourself these two questions and answer them honestly.

First, “What am I afraid of?” Seriously. Simply identifying the fear and giving it a name will often remove the power it holds over you.

Then ask, “What if my worst fear came true?” Making a mistake or looking stupid could make you feel bad but it will not kill you. Whatever your particular fear, magnify it.

Think of the worst that could possibly happen. Chances are, you would survive it—and it may not as bad as the misery and frustration you feel as a procrastinator.

The games we play

What if you have something so important to do that not doing it will get you in trouble? But you can’t get started. Do you indulge in some form of avoidance that I call Hypocritical Procrastination? Do you become a Traveler, going back and forth to the coffee pot? Or a Perfect Preparer who can never do enough research? Or a Socializer who calls old friends you haven’t spoken to in years? Or a Happy Helper, putting your own work aside in order to help someone else?

Once you become conscious of your avoidance style, you can watch for it. Notice, for example, that instead of preparing for a meeting, you’re cleaning out your desk. Hypocritical procrastination, in all its variations, has one characteristic in common: a lack of focus.

When you feel overwhelmed

Sometimes we have trouble focusing because we feel overwhelmed, deluged, swamped. We have too many chores or one project that seems so huge or so complicated that we become immobilized. Our tendency may be to just stop thinking, stop deciding, stop doing anything.

A top-honored approach to help us deal with this problem is contained in the Chinese proverb: “A journey of 10,000 miles begins with but a single step.”

So make a list of the mini-journeys you will need to take. In other words, write down all of the small tasks that are part of your overwhelming project.

If your list starts to become too intimidating, break it down into several shorter lists.

Focus on single steps

After you have identified the small tasks or jobs that form your large project, concentrate on taking “but a single step.” Focus on doing one item on your list. Then scan your list for other single steps that you can take.

Determine along the way whether a particular job can be streamlined, delegated or eliminated. Is there a task you could skip without compromising the overall project? Now you’re ready to chip away at the job, one task at a time.


The ‘back timing’ approach to setting deadlines

Here’s another strategy to use when you’re feeling overwhelmed. Set “back timed” interim deadlines for yourself. This can eliminate situations where you’re heading down the final stretch and discover that you need something—but it’s too late to get it.

How does it work? Start with the real deadline and work backward to the present, setting interim, target or even “fake” deadlines for accomplishing parts of your project.

Back timing makes a project more manageable. It helps you anticipate obstacles and eliminate last-minute stresses. It can apply to many projects from putting out a news release to planning a wedding.

When you approach a project backward, use your imagination to visualize what’s happening. This will help you think of details that could head off a major problem.

For example, when you are planning to write a report, imagine what you’ll need to have ready when you get started. Then set a deadline ahead of time to gather all the vital materials you’ll need, rather than starting on the report and then hitting the panic button.

—R.E.
Lighter lifting works well for most people

Researchers have found that people who lift light weights regularly get nearly the same benefits as those who do heavy-weight workouts, says Brad Schoenfeld, PhD, director of the Human Performance Lab at Lehman College in New York City.

Why does this matter?

“The lighter-weight approach can make strength training safer and more enjoyable,” says Dr. Schoenfeld. “Men and women who lift light weights instead of heavy ones are also less likely to experience joint, tendon or ligament injury. Plus, those workouts are easier for older adults with arthritis or other health problems and those new to weight-lifting.”

Many elite athletes still favor the traditional approach, which is to lift at the edge of their ability—targeting what’s called “fast-twitch muscle fibers,” the ones that grow quickly and create a shapely physique.

But studies reported in the journal Sports Medicine have shown that “slow-twitch fibers,” the ones stimulated more by light lifting, can also develop and grow.

If you are not trying to develop your strength to the utmost, but simply want to look better and improve your functional capacity—your ability to work in the yard, carry groceries and play recreational sports—you can do just as well with lighter loads, says Dr. Schoenfeld.

There’s an added bonus as well, he says. Building muscle mass helps control blood sugar.

—Adapted from Bottom Line Health

Have you heard the one about…?

By Brad Schoenfeld

One broth for your joints? Cherry juice for insomnia? Collagen to firm up your skin? Magnesium for leg cramps? Vinegar to lower blood sugar, fight cancer and relieve heartburn, among other claims?

Is there any evidence that these products actually work? Here’s what we’ve learned from the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Animal bone broth?

Paleo diet enthusiasts swear by the gelatin-rich liquid, also known as “stock.” They say it’s good for joints and bones, aids digestion and boosts the immune system. But so far, there are no human studies to support these ideas.

Like any protein, the gelatin in stock is digested in the GI tract into amino acids, which are absorbed. This means that blood and immune cells never actually see the broth we eat because it is digested first. The bottom line: bone broth may taste good, but a magic potion it is not.

Tart cherry juice for sleep?

It’s been called a “miracle sleep aid” by Dr. Oz. But a small study found that adults with sleeping problems who drank 8 ounces of a tart cherry-apple juice blend twice a day for two weeks did not report sleeping longer, falling asleep any faster or feeling less fatigued. At 130 calories a cup, cherry juice could add more inches to your waist than minutes to your sleep.

The virtues of vinegar?

If you believe what you read on drinking apple cider vinegar will brighten your skin, remove warts, banish belly fat, help your heart and much more. But what is truly special about the product, says Arizona State University researcher Carol Johnston, is “good marketing.”

There is no evidence to date that vinegar consumption relieves heartburn or fights cancer. There’s some evidence that it could help lower your blood sugar. So if you are prediabetic and want to give it a try, keep in mind that most studies diluted 1 tablespoon in 8 ounces of water. Straight vinegar can burn your mouth and cause ulcers, and gargling with vinegar can damage tooth enamel.

Collagen for younger skin?

Leading brands of collagen pills claim they help maintain youthful skin. And while our skin does consist mostly of collagen, the human body’s machinery for making it just doesn’t work as well when we age, says University of Michigan molecular dermatology professor Gary Fisher.

“So, unless your diet is deficient, loading up on collagen supplements is not likely to do anything,” Dr. Fisher says. “If you really want to protect your skin, you’re better off investing in a broad-spectrum sunscreen.”

Magnesium for leg cramps?

Many older adults report painful leg cramps at night, and the use of magnesium supplements has become a popular treatment for cramps in some countries.

Researchers in Israel assigned 94 people who reported leg cramps to take either magnesium oxide or a placebo at bedtime. After one month, they found no difference in the frequency or severity of leg cramps.

What to do to breathe easier in your car

Most cars run cleaner and have less pollution these days, but there’s also a lot more traffic. The nonprofit Ecology Center in Michigan measures the chemicals inside cars and offers these suggestions:

In traffic, keep a safe distance from the vehicles ahead of you, especially diesel trucks and obviously polluting cars.

When stopped at traffic lights, close your windows.

In light or no traffic, drive with windows cracked to let in some fresh air.

—Adapted from Bottom Line Health

What to do to breathe easier in your car

Maintain your car. A poorly maintained car is likely to pollute the air inside as well as outside. Keep the interior vacuumed and cleaned.

If possible, choose less congested roads or car pool lanes. The more traffic, the more pollution.

If you have a new car, try to drive on less busy roads and keep the windows open as much as possible for a couple of months—when the odor of chemical materials (VOCs) in your car is strongest. And don’t park in sunlight.

Avoid air fresheners. They can make matters worse.

Don’t smoke in your car or allow other people to smoke.
Tips on writing, speaking and daily communication

How you communicate—in person, in writing and online—has a tremendous impact on your career. It affects every aspect of your work life, no matter how skilled you are in your particular field.

In her new book, The Communication Clinic, Barbara Pachter, speaker and writer on business etiquette and the power of positive confrontation, covers a range of topics that are important for people beginning their careers as well as seasoned professionals.

For example, in a section called “Business Writing in a Digital World,” Pachter has chapters on “Effective Use of Email Subject Lines,” “How Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Others Can Kill Your Career,” “Texting for Business: Is it Still Writing?” and “The Top 10 Grammar Gripes (and Other Errors).”

Since the ability to make an effective presentation is an essential skill for many of us, Pachter tells how to overcome the panic that often accompanies public speaking.

She offers tips for gearing a speech to a specific audience, speaking on a panel, eliminating filler words such as “um,” “you know” and “okay” and how to get people to ask questions.

Pachter encourages assertive behavior as an alternative to being too shy or too aggressive.

As she suggests: “Say what you want to say, need to say and choose to say in a polite and powerful manner.”

Her book includes a section on how to handle awkward situations, voice your opinions in meetings and some ways to deliver difficult news.

Pachter suggests seven ways to help restore civility in today’s too often uncivil world. They include: Don’t attack back. Use courteous behavior. Disagree agreeably. Avoid inflammatory words. Acknowledge your mistakes. Stop complaining.