

10 Tips for Talking with Your Child*

1. Start Early

- a. When young children want information, advice and guidance, they turn to their parents first

2. Initiate Conversations with your Child...

- a. For example, say that you and your 10 year old are watching TV together and the program's plot includes bullying . After the show is over, ask your child what she thought or her feelings related to the program. Did she agree with the behavior? Just one or two questions could help start a valuable discussion that comes from everyday circumstances and events.
- b. If you have more than one child – and they are far apart in age- try to speak with them separately, even about the same subject

3. ...Even About Difficult Subjects (Drugs, Violence, Sex and Relationships)

- a. “You know I’m uncomfortable talking about sex because my parents never talked to me about it. But I want us to be able to talk about anything – including sex-so please come to me with any questions and if I don’t have answers I’ll find out”
- b. If your child hasn’t brought the subject up look for opportunities to do so

4. Create an Open Environment

- a. Kids will look to parents for answers only if they feel they will be open to their questions
- b. **What you know is a lot less important than how you respond.** If you can convey the message that no subject including sex is forbidden in your home, you’ll be doing just fine
- c. You don’t need to answer all of your child’s questions immediately.
 - i. “That’s an important question. But with all this traffic, I can’t explain right now. Let’s talk later, after dinner”. (And make sure you do.)
 - ii. “That’s an interesting question, but I’m not sure. Let’s look it up.”

5. Communicate Your Values

- a. Children want and need moral guidance from their moms and dads so don’t hesitate to make your beliefs clear regarding all topics

6. Listen to Your Child

- a. Undivided attention conveys the message that your child is important to you and builds their self esteem
- b. Gauge what they know when they ask you a question: “Tell me what you know about...”
- c. Know when they have had enough: If, after a while of discussion, your child says “I want to go out and play”, stop the talk and reintroduce the subject at another time.

7. Try to be Honest

- a. Strengthens your child’s ability to trust

8. Be Patient

- a. Kids take a little longer to get their story out and it’s important to listen patiently which allows your child to think at their own pace and conveys the message that you are letting them know that they are worthy of your time.

9. Use Everyday Opportunities to Talk

- a. “Talk opportunities” – that arise in everyday life
 - i. while driving, watching TV, reading the paper, tucking your child in at night, etc.
 - ii. “What are your thoughts about...; Do you know anyone who...; What are the positive and negative consequences...what can happen from...; I wonder what leads a child to...; Have you heard about...”

10. Talk About It Again and Again...Repetition is normal and necessary

- a. Kids can only take in small bits of information at any one time so they won’t learn it all from one single conversation
- b. Let time pass and ask your child to tell you what they remember from your conversation which will help you fill in the gaps and correct any misconception

*Adapted from www.talkingwithkids.org

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