



Tips for Everyday Conversations

Setting some time aside to talk can be hard with competing schedules and different personalities. Try these ideas for finding ways to connect.

- Many children **don't like "just talking."** So be open to conversations while playing basketball, taking a hike, working on a service project, or driving in the car.
- Remember that everyone **is comfortable with different situations.** Some kids may prefer talking in public places like restaurants, fitness centers, or parks. Others prefer the privacy of home.
- **Eliminate distractions** during family times. Turn off cell phones or TV, or turn down the music. Play a board game instead of watching TV.
- **Designate a regular family time.** Have a weekly family night, a monthly outing, or a daily check-in before bed. Do what works best for your family.
- **Try starting conversations in new ways**—instead of always asking how school was, greet your child with a reflection about your own day, such as “Hey, it’s good to see you—something exciting happened at work today that I’ve been wanting to tell you about,” or “Tell me something exciting about your day.”
- Unless what you’re doing is very important, **be willing to stop and listen to your child** when he or she has something to say. When you cannot stop to listen, explain the reason and make a plan to reconnect later. For example, you could say, “I want to hear more about this, but I’m running late for work. Will you tell me more about it during dinner tonight?”

Tips for Tough Conversations

Sometimes you need to have a hard conversation, or an everyday conversation becomes difficult. Try these tips to help it go well.

- **Talk when both you and your child are calm.** People calm down at different rates. One person may be ready to talk but the other may not. Make sure both you and your child can speak calmly about the tough issue.
- **Act soon.** Deal with tough issues as they arise, especially when they’re small. Don’t wait for the problem to get worse. Even though your relationship may get tense in the short term, that’s better than having problems grow too big to manage well.
- **Listen to your child.** Too often, we focus on what we want to say, what we want to teach. Take time to really listen to your child. People are more likely to work through tough issues when both sides feel heard and respected.
- **Discuss the issue more than once.** A tough issue cannot be resolved in one conversation. You may need to revisit the topic times over multiple weeks (or months or years).
- **Work together on the issue.** Most parents don’t have all the answers. Work with your child. If you’re not making much progress, get others involved. School counselors and social workers often can provide helpful insights and solutions. Other parents may have suggestions. Ask for help. Keep asking until you get help that truly makes a difference.

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