



Tips for Establishing Open and Honest Parent-Child Communication

Research has shown that nurturing parenting and supportive family environments are two factors that reduce the risk of child abuse. Establishing open and honest communication is great first step!

Yet, sometimes parents can find it challenging to get their children to talk to them. Does this conversation sound familiar?

How was your day? Fine.

How was school? Good.

How was your test? OK.

Anything you want to tell me? Nope.

Below are practical tips for setting the stage for conversations with your children:

- **Make regular conversations with your children a priority.** Talk with your children as much as you can. These discussions can occur during a planned time set aside or during life's many teachable moments.
- **Eat dinners as a family.** Research shows that children, whose family eats dinner together regularly, are less likely to become involved with drugs and more likely to get good grades. Families who eat dinner together a few times per week talk more and as a result, parents will be more likely to hear about problems that are occurring in their children's lives (WebMD Family Dinners are Important).
- **Communicate family and religious values.** Leave no room for misunderstanding about what is and what is not acceptable behavior.

- **Allow children to make their own decisions and trust them to do the right thing.** Teach children how to problem solve. Provide nonjudgmental input and stand back. Be understanding as they make mistakes.
- **Be open.** Show you child that they may come to you with any problem.
- **Allow children privacy.** The best discussions occur when it is just the two of you.
- **Be an active listener.** Make eye contact. Ask questions and clarify information. Try not to appear intrusive.
- **Avoid the word “why.”** Why questions can sound and feel judgmental.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** Questions that can be answered by a “yes” or “no” do not encourage conversation. For example, “tell me about the party” as opposed to “did you have fun at the party?”
- **Take advantage of life’s teachable moments.** A teachable moment is an unplanned opportunity that arises where you can offer insight. It is not something that you can plan; it is a momentary opening that must be sensed and acted upon in the moment. For example, a story on the news about a teenager’s death in an automobile accident might be good time to discuss the importance of not texting while driving.