

Family Pack 1 – Communication

Regularly talking with and listening to your children reinforces that they can talk with you about both the positive and the more challenging aspects of their lives. Make sure to engage them in genuine conversations about a variety of topics that are fun as well as more serious and thought provoking topics.

Try to arrange times when you can walk or sit side-by-side and chat. This is a more relaxed way to have a conversation and enables your children to feel more comfortable talking with you about difficult topics.

Open the lines of communication

If you talk with your children about daily topics, there will be greater chance they will talk about more difficult issues such as bullying or social issues.

When your children talk to you about day-to-day things, where possible, stop what you are doing and listen. Be supportive and encourage them to talk. You don't have to know everything about their life. However, you do need to try to keep in touch with what is happening on a day-to-day basis. Try and reassure your children and make it clear that they can talk with you no matter the topic.

Ask yourself

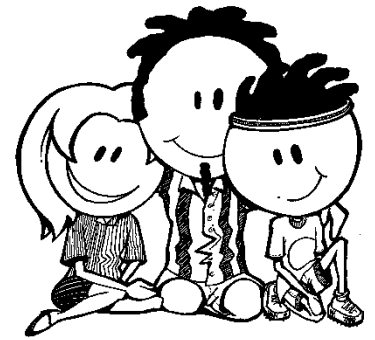
- Are there times each day when I am able to share some time with my children?
- Do I really listen to my children and what they have to say?
- Do I show my children that I am really interested to hear their opinions and thoughts?

Tips for communicating with your child

- Be supportive and encourage them to talk.
- Show your children you enjoy talking with them.
- Let your children know you are always interested in what is going on in their lives, not only when they are in trouble or having problems.
- Arrange opportunities to share time with your children when you can talk while doing an activity together, for example, cooking, craft, going to the football, family mealtimes or family meetings.
- Get down to their level and make eye contact. When talking with younger children, get down to their eye level by sitting or bending down.
- Talk shoulder to shoulder. Older children will often talk more freely when you sit or walk shoulder to shoulder. Travelling in the car is a good place for a chat.
- Set an example to your children in the way you speak to your family and other adults. Children learn much from watching people they love and admire.

Listening and asking questions

Listen to your children to find out how they are feeling and what is going on in their lives. Sometimes a child may not tell you that something is wrong, but by listening to them you can tell if they are happy or if something is bothering them.



Open-ended questions

A good way to encourage your children to talk with you is to use open-ended questions. These questions encourage children to talk because you ask for more than just a “yes” or “no” answer. An example of an open question might be “What did you do on the weekend?” This is a question that allows for an interesting answer: “I had a sleepover at my friend’s house, and we went to the movies, rode our bikes”. A closed question in the same situation, such as “Did you have a nice weekend?” only allows for a brief answer: “Yes”.

Closed-ended question	Open-ended question
Did you have a good day?	What was the best part of your day?
How was school?	What did you do at school today?
How did the game go?	Tell me all about the game?
How was the party?	Who was at the party? What did you do at the party?

How to listen and ask good questions

- Look at your children when they are talking and occasionally nod or say “yes” to signal you have understood.
- Stand or sit still while you are listening
- Pay attention and think carefully about what is being said.
- When your children stop speaking, show you have really listened by asking a good question based on what they have just said.
- Be a good role-model and demonstrating good listening skills

Open ended questions for tricky topics

It can sometimes be hard to get your children to open up to you if they are having a problem. Particularly if the problem is with a friend or classmate. Open ended questions can help to open up a discussion.

Try some of these:

- What happened today?
- What do you think about...?
- It sounds like you are pretty unhappy, what has been going on?

Tips for tricky topics

- Allow for “cooling off” time. When you or your children are feeling very angry or upset, consider using a “cooling off” time before you try to talk.
- Encourage and role model positive language, for example: “I really like the way you asked your brother if you could borrow his bike.”
- Use positive words. Explain to your children what to say and do rather than what not to say and do. Try: “Please speak to me in a quiet, calm voice,” rather than “don’t yell at me.”
- Acknowledge your children’s efforts to communicate. When your children have told you about a challenging issue; tell them you are proud of them for talking to you about it.

Conversations

Having conversations with your kids means focusing on them and learning about them, their ideas, their opinions and what is important to them. Try having more conversations with your children that focus on them and their world.



Talking shoulder to shoulder

Good conversation often occurs in those times when you are side-by-side like driving to school or sport, walking together to get somewhere, in the kitchen cooking or doing the dishes.

During these times you and your child know that you have that time together. While you are mostly looking at what you are doing and not directly at each other, this creates a casual opportunity to chat.

These times are particularly good for having tricky conversations. When you are engaged in a side-by-side conversation it takes the pressure off your child (and you) because you are not facing each other and making direct eye contact.

Especially as they get older, kids tend to feel more relaxed and open up more when they are doing other things side-by-side. So, if you want your child to open up more or if you need to engage in a tricky conversation, use the time in the car, on the way to school or sport, or go for a walk.

Tips for positive conversations

- Ask your children their opinion on events, issues and general daily proceedings, so they feel their opinion is valued.
- Use evening meals to generate conversations among the family so everyone can have a chance to participate and contribute.
- Focusing on one child at a time teaches your other children to listen and care about what their siblings are contributing.
- Be sure that you take a turn to share as well. Let your children listen to your input the same way you listen to theirs.
- Use daily activities like doing dishes, helping with cooking or in the car, to create opportunities for casual conversations.
- Sit beside your child while they are on the computer and ask them to explain to you how what they are using works, what they think about the technology and how they use it.

Keep talking!

As children move closer to adolescence they may not want to talk as much with their parents as before. This does not mean they don't want to talk to their parents. Nor does it mean they have nothing to say. To help children feel supported, it is important at this time for parents to not give up and keep asking questions and talking on a regular basis. Children who feel their parents are always there when they need them usually feel closer to, and like being a member of the family. This feeling of closeness between family members helps to protect children from many problems, including bullying.

Family Activity Sheet 1 – Communication

Conversation starters

You can discuss these questions at the dinner table or in another location when the whole family can focus on the conversation. You could make a fun game by printing out the questions, cutting them up so they're on individual strips of paper and have each family member pick out a question or two to discuss. You may need to read the question for younger children.

If you could talk to an animal if which one would you choose to talk to and what would you ask?

If someone gave you \$50 dollars what would you do with it?

What colour makes you feel happy and why?

What is your favourite letter of the alphabet? Why?

If you could design a zoo, and you could only have 5 animals which would you choose?

If you could make up a brand new school subject, what would it be?

When you are sad how do you make yourself feel better?

If you could do one thing, every day, for the rest of your life, what would it be?

If you had a robot for one day what would you ask it to do?

What is your favourite thing about yourself?

If your friend was feeling upset what are some things you could do?

If you wrote a book what would it be about?

If you could be invisible for a day what would you do?

If you were sad what could you do to try to cheer yourself up?