

Make Time to Talk to Your Children

Children and parents alike lead busy lives in today's society. Parents are attending PTA meetings, going to work, driving their kids to a practice or meeting. It seems that we seldom find time to sit down and talk with children.

"How was school?" is usually answered with a short and to the point "Fine." While, "What did you learn?" is followed by the typical "nothing," response. While this does constitute talking, it is not the meaningful conversation that needs to happen between parents and their children.

Sometimes we forget the importance of talking to children. Just like it is important to talk to your friends, your spouse, and your co-workers it is important to talk to your children. Your children learn everyday life lessons through conversation with their parents. Talking to your kids about tough issues, or not so tough issues, helps them to realize what actions are considered acceptable and those that are unacceptable. Talking openly with your children helps you to find out what they are doing, where they are going and who they are hanging out with. Most important talking to your children helps to show them that you care. You care about them and a person and value what they have to say and you care about their safety and well-being.

Talking to your kids is not always easy. There are a lot of tough issues that are hard to address. Here are some tips that will help to keep the lines of communication open, and in turn help your child to feel like they can come to you with their problems, rather than looking to other people or other things to solve their problems.

1. Start at an early age. Kid have to deal with tough issues at an early age. You as a parent have the opportunity to provide your child with correct information before their friends, the media, and other outside sources influence their thinking. This is especially important with tough issues like sex, drugs, violence, and alcohol.

2. Initiate the conversation. The best way to do this is look for teachable moments. If you and your child are watching television and something comes up that you feel is an issue to what to talk about seize the opportunity to talk about it at that time. After the show is over, ask your child what she thought of the program. Did she agree with how the characters acted or reacted to a given situation? Just one or two questions could help start a valuable discussion that comes from everyday circumstances and events.
3. Create an open environment. Children often ask us questions to which we may not know the answer, or we really don't want to answer. Some questions are farfetched while others are taboo topics that we may feel they are too young to talk about. When questions like this arise it is important that we don't ignore them, but rather help our children to understand and find the answer to the question. If a subject come up that you don't feel your child should be asking about you need to remember that they must know something about it, after all they were able to ask a questions about it. In the end it is better that you are the one answering it rather than a friend or the media, sources that may not provide your child with an answer that contains the ideas your family values.
4. Communicate your values. How do children learn values unless their parents teach them? Be sure to communicate values to your children before society, friends and the media have a chance to influence them.
5. Listen to your children. This is important for two reasons. Listening to your children helps to increase their self-esteem. It shows that we care about what they have to say and that you value their thought and ideas. It also helps a parent to get a better idea of what a child wants. Listening does not include nodding while folding clothes, watching TV, or making supper. It means actually sitting down with your child and having a face to face conversation.

6. Be patient. Have you ever heard the never-ending story from your child. The one that takes 30 minutes to get to the point they are trying to make. This is frustrating to adults, they have things to do and want to get to the point. Letting our children tell a story rather than interrupting them helps them to think at their own pace and shows how much we value what they have to say.
7. Talk about it again, and again, and again. Children can only take in so much information at one time. Continuing to talk about issues that are valuable to your child's well-being is important. Society and the media will continue to try and create a value system for your child. As parents you must also continue to instill a value system into your child's life.

While actually having a conversation with your child is sometime time consuming and not always easy, it is important. For more information on this or other related subjects please contact the University of Missouri Extension Center in Henry County at 660-885-5556.

Source: "<http://www.talkingwithkids.org>."

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