

How to Get Your Kids to Talk to You

Three steps to increase communication with your children

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We've all been there. Your child gets home from school and you ask the golden question, "How was your day?" Chances are you've probably received the following three responses:

- "Fine."
- "Good."
- A non-verbal shrug

This type of interaction is likely so common that you accept their automated response and then provide your own autopilot reply and continue doing whatever it was you were just doing. However, it's doubtful that either of you enjoy this disconnected routine. So, how do you change it? Start by tapping into your creativity.

By following these three steps, you'll not only increase healthy communication between you and your child, you'll also be stimulating their brain development. It's a win-win!

Step One: Do not ask them how their day was

Yes, you read that correctly. Avoid asking too many closed-ended questions. Instead, try these:

- Tell me something interesting that happened today.
- What was your favorite part of the day?
- Tell me about something that made you feel happy today? (Or sad, mad, frustrated, excited, jealous. Don't overwhelm them with every feeling. Pick one or two to explore.)
- Tell me about something that made you laugh today.
- What is something you're looking forward to today? (Ask this during breakfast)
- What is something you felt annoyed with today?

Step Two: Be a parrot parent

If you want increased communication with your child, you have to teach them how to communicate. Model active listening by repeating back to them what they just told you. Stop whatever you are doing to give them eye contact and turn your body towards them. That means, put your cell phone down or step away from your laptop. Try to paraphrase or seek clarification when needed – show them that you're interested in what they're saying. Use the example below as a guideline:

Parent: "Tell me about something interesting that happened today."

Child: "Well, Coach Smith gave everyone nick names. That was pretty funny."

Parent: "It sounds like you had a good time coming up with nick names for everyone. What's yours?"

Step Three: Tell them how you feel

We're not mind readers and kids aren't either. When you enjoy an interaction or appreciate something your child has done or said, tell them! This may seem like common sense to some, but many of us feel like appreciation and emotion are unspoken knowledge. It's not. If you want your kids to express their emotions and show appreciation – you have to show them how to do that. Use the example below as a guideline:

Parent: "I love when you tell me fun stuff about your day. It makes me happy when we get to chat."

This response would come at the end of the after-school conversation. It shows your child you care about them and enjoy talking to them. By expressing your appreciation and enjoyment, you're also teaching them how to communicate and express themselves effectively. It's also important to express displeasure. For example:

Parent: "I felt sad yesterday when you didn't want to share anything with me about your day. I care about you and knowing about how your day went is important to me. However, I understand that sometimes the day can be overwhelming and you won't want to share much and I respect that."

The above example could be implemented when a child still chooses not to elaborate about their day or engage in conversation. Instead of forcing them to talk, which is neither effective nor healthy, using an "I Statement" and expressing how it makes you feel, models appropriate communication and shows them you also respect their emotions and needs.