



TO THE POINTE

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Going Beyond “How was your day?”

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With new school year underway it seems like a good time to highlight some communication strategies that parents can use to help kids feel validated and understood during a transitional time that can bring up a lot of emotions and new experiences. A great way to improve communication with our kids is to build in quality check-in time with them on a regular basis. Chatting with kids about little things that are on their mind is important because it establishes a dynamic in which they are more likely to come to you when they really have something important going on in their life. While it may seem like we are busier than ever, being intentional with your time can make all the difference. For example, ask about each other's day during dinner or try a conversation game from the next page, spend five minutes checking in before bed or in the morning, have an afterschool snack together, go for a walk together, or schedule weekly family meetings. Once you have committed to setting aside the time here are a few important things to keep in mind.

- Give them your full attention. Turn off your phone and the TV, take a break from cooking, cleaning, or other tasks. This is hard to do but it sends a clear message to the other person that talking to them is the most important thing you have to do at that moment.
- Mind your non-verbal language. Be aware of how your face and body language might be perceived. Crossing your arms, frowning, eye rolling, or looking away frequently can cause the other person to shut down.

Nodding, smiling, and making eye contact are as important as the words that you use.

- Notice the other person's non-verbal cues. Paying attention to the facial expressions, body language and tone of voice of the other person gives you important insights and clues to how they are feeling.
- Listen actively and paraphrase. Listen for the big picture and focus on the underlying emotions rather than just the details. Paraphrase or re-state in your own words what is being said to make sure you understand and to show that you are interested and attentive.
- Ask questions. Ask questions about who, what, where, and when to make sure you fill in any gaps in understanding but be careful not to turn the conversation into an interrogation.
- Show respect and consideration. Stay positive, sincere, and patient. Ask if they are done before talking or moving on. Check to see if they want advice or just want someone to listen before offering any.

Sometimes families may need help from a professional to facilitate these kinds of conversations and to find new ways to work through the challenges that come with life. Seeking out family therapy, even briefly, can really help improve communication and relationships among family members. Every person and family system has difficulties at one time

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or another and seeking out support should never be viewed negatively.

Finally, look over the conversation starters and games on the next page for some creative ways to help your kids open up and get the conversation flowing.

Family Conversation Games



Rose, Thorn, and Bud

Play the game rose, thorn, and bud at dinner or whenever you have a few uninterrupted moments. To play the game each person takes a turn talking while others listen, use an object to pass around to whoever is speaking if needed. The speaker says something that was positive about their day (rose), something that was a challenge or did not go well (thorn) and something that they feel hopeful about or are looking forward to (bud).



Two Truths and a Lie

Each family member takes a turn stating two true events that happened to them that day and one that is made-up. Other family member's try to guess which event was a lie.



Conversation in a jar

Have family members write out conversation starters (see below or have fun making up your own) on strips of paper and then put them in a jar. Take turns pulling them out and answering them.

- What's something that made you smile today?
- Did you learn anything new in school today?
- Who is your best friend and what do you like about that person?
- What's something you really want to learn how to do?
- What's your favorite part of the day?
- What do you usually play at recess?
- What's your favorite subject?
- If you could have any job, what would it be?
- Has something ever happened at school that made you really upset? What was it?
- What's one thing you did to help someone recently?
- What would be your dream job?
- If you could have a secret super power what would it be?
- What super power would you not want to have?
- What is your favorite season of the year? Why?
- What is something you really want to learn how to do or get better at?
- Where is a place that you would like to visit someday?
- What person from history do you wish you could meet? Why?



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