

### Become a Communication-Friendly Parent

"How was your day?" — "Okay."

"What did you learn in school?" — "Nothing."

If you've had conversations like this with your child, take heart — you're not alone. It happens all the time, particularly as kids enter their roller-coaster pre-teen years.

But being a communication-friendly parent is crucial during this time of rapid change. Moreover, many of the communication patterns you and your child create today will be the ones you follow for the rest of your lives.

#### Start the Conversation

**Ask if it's okay.** A simple question like "Is this a good time to talk?" can get the ball rolling. If your child says "no," come back with a quick follow-up: "Well, when would be?" If your child can't think of a good time to talk, just set one up anyway.

**Set a good example.** Want to know how your child's day was? Show your child how to talk about his or her day by first talking about your day and then asking them about theirs.

**Plan something.** Whether it's a family vacation, visit to a family member, shopping trip or even something as simple as choosing a video to watch, kids like to be involved and feel like their opinions count.

**Make the most of your child's style.** For example, while many girls are comfortable just sitting down with a parent and talking, boys are often less self-conscious talking to a parent if they're also sharing an activity such as playing a game of catch or building a model.

#### Improve Your Connect Ability

**Ask the right questions.** Sometimes we make it easy for children to keep quiet by asking vague questions that can be answered with a simple "yes," "no," or "I don't know." For example, instead of asking "How was school today?" try something like "What do you

think about your history teacher?" "What did you do today that you were proud of?" If your child gives you a one-word answer, say "Tell me more."

**Seize the moment.** Pay attention to teachable moments that occur throughout the day and that can trigger important conversations. For example, use events that happen on your child's favorite television shows to begin conversations about peer pressure or sexual relationships. Your child will be more comfortable talking about these issues this way than if you raised them out of the blue.

**Listen effectively.** Effective listening skills include rephrasing your child's comments to show you understand, paying close attention to your child's face and body language, and giving non-verbal support and encouragement. You should also encourage your child to keep talking by saying things like, "How do you feel about that?"

#### Creating Connections

**Share a hobby.** Exploring an interest that you can both enjoy, whether it's rollerblading or fashion, can result in hours of naturally-flowing conversation.

**Look at baby pictures.** A walk down memory lane is a great way to bring up other awkward topics including the many physical and emotional changes that occur throughout your child's life.

**Make car time conversation time.** The moments you have together in the car can help you share important information and emotions. You can also learn a lot about your child if you pay attention to his or her conversations with friends while they're riding in the back seat.

**See your child as others do.** Many parents only see their children when they're at home. Get involved with your child's school. Volunteer to help with extra-curricular programs, such as theater or sports. You may discover new and wonderful aspects to your child that you otherwise would have missed.

— Source: Adapted from *Let's Connect: A Guide to Communication-Friendly Parenting*, by Lawrence Kutner, PhD.