

STARLING

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Jump-Starting Conversations with Children



Communicating with children should be easy—right? It's actually a little tricky, so it helps to know what types of comments and questions encourage a good chat. The good news is that although meaningful communication may take some trial and error, it's a skill that can be learned.

Follow your child's lead:

Children's imaginative questions can actually generate very interesting and humorous discussions.

"Do worms have legs?" "Why do apples have seeds?" "Why do my teeth fall out?" These are the subjects they are interested in, for the moment, at least. As parents, we often go in a different direction when we try to communicate. Our questions may not be as imaginative and may even sound like an interrogation. "Is Jamie still your best friend?" "Have you studied your spelling words?"

Ask the right questions:

In our attempt to get children to open up, we often don't get the response we're hoping for. "Did you have fun at school today?" "Yes." A better approach is to ask open-ended questions that can't be answered with a simple yes or no. They require children to think before responding and to use their vocabulary. "What was the most interesting thing you learned at school today?"

By listening to the answer, parents can learn a lot about their child's thoughts and feelings.

This type of question also

builds self-esteem because the child's opinion is being valued.

Timing is everything:

Hungry, tired, or cranky children are not likely to place conversation at the top of their agenda. They are also less apt to enjoy conversation if they are busy, such as in the middle of an art project that's requiring a lot of their attention or in the morning when rushing to get out the door. Children often want to share things when they first get home from school or from a friend's house. Bath times, driving in a car, or bedtime are also good times for many families to share some concerns or special memories of the day.

Actively listen:

It's easy to fall into the trap of speaking to children as if they're adults or colleagues. If we ask, "How are you?" to a friend, we don't expect a lengthy, detailed answer. But if we ask a child, "How was your day, sweetie?" they may *really* tell us how their day was. If we're distracted or rush on to the next topic, it's confusing to children, and we've missed a real opportunity. Have fun with your child—keep on talking *and* listening!

Key In to Good Communication

- Ask open-ended questions.
- Give your child enough time to answer questions.
- Listen to what your child has to say.
- Simplify or rephrase a question if you need to.
- Repeat what your child has said, to make sure you understand.
- Ask another question to extend thinking.
- When an answer is not known, look it up together when you can.
- Remember to share your thoughts and daily activities with your child.

PERSONAL PARENTING

Car Seat Questions

You want to choose a car seat appropriate for your child's age, height, and weight, but there are so many on the market. Here are some Web sites that will make you feel more confident with your selection.

- For a list of car seats that meet federal safety standards, visit the Web site of the American Academy of Pediatrics, www.aap.org/family/carseatguide.html
- Learn which car seats have been recalled since 1990 by checking out the Web site of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Office of Defects Investigation, at www.odi.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/recalls/childseat.cfm.

Create a Discovery Drawer

After babies take their first few steps, they get into everything. Even though a lot of cabinets and drawers must stay off-limits and be locked for safety, try to make one drawer accessible for toddlers to explore. Fill it with fun and interesting items such as measuring cups and spoons, small bowls with lids, and empty boxes. Let your baby open the drawer and discover all the fun things inside!



The Benefits of Breakfast!

Kids need fuel to get the most out of the many activities they take part in every day. Beginning the day with a nutritious breakfast helps with learning. According to the American Dietetic Association, children who eat a healthy breakfast are more likely to:

- * Concentrate better
- * Have better problem-solving skills
- * Have better hand-eye coordination
- * Be more creative
- * Miss fewer days of school
- * Be more physically active

Healthy Breakfast Options:

- * Cooked oatmeal with raisins or dried cranberries
- * Cold wholegrain cereal with fruit
- * A wholewheat pita stuffed with scrambled egg and low-fat cheese
- * Leftover vegetable pizza
- * Vegetables, salsa, and low-fat cheese wrapped in a tortilla
- * A smoothie blended from fruit, low-fat yogurt, and a spoonful of wheat germ
- * Multigrain pancakes with fruit and yogurt

Marvelous Music Activities

Kids love music, and it's never too early to give them opportunities to appreciate it.

- Listen to a variety of music from different cultures.
- Make up words to familiar songs, to make routine times easier. Try a tooth-brushing song or a pick-up-your-toys song to a familiar tune.

*Soothe a baby to sleep with a lullaby.
Let your child paint a picture to music.
Get physical by creating new dances.
Learn to play an instrument.*



Back to School

Yes, going back to school can be hectic and stressful, but it's also a time filled with new adventures. There are tons of items on the to-do lists and lots of advice to give. Most parents are faced with back-to-school purchases—lunch boxes and backpacks, the right paper and the best box of crayons. Along with your child's school supplies, you might want to pick up a notebook for yourself, too. You can use it for your lists, but it's especially good for recording the many amazing events that happen throughout the year.

As you and your children navigate back-to-school shopping and the first days of school, don't forget to keep a sense of humor. Consider these scenarios, and when your child says something equally engaging, write it down. You'll be glad you did.

The "Official" School Supply List

Kleenex was on Mari's school supply list. At the store, there were many choices of box sizes, patterns, and brands. And while her mom wanted to be practical

and buy the cheapest, plainest box of "tissues," Mari, a really good reader, pointed out that the "ugly" boxes were not "Kleenex." She listened to her mom's mini lecture about brand names before bursting into tears. "I'll get in trouble with my teacher if I don't have Kleenex. My list says, Kleenex." Mom quickly realized that the extra pennies spent on the Kleenex brand would be pennies well spent.



Kindergarten Innocence

Kenji, an energetic kindergartner came home after the first day of school with a great observation. "It's really strange, Mom. Almost all the teachers at school have the same first name." When asked

what name that was, Kenji went on to explain, "They're all named 'Mrs.'" He then added with great enthusiasm, "And, we have gym tomorrow!" He thought for a minute. "But what is gym?"

Back-to-school Practical Advice:

- Be interested and involved in your child's school experiences. Ask specific questions, did you sing a new song at Circle Time? What was out on the science table today?
 - If your schedule allows, volunteer in the classroom, help with a special event, or go on a field trip. It's a great way to get to know the teacher, children, and school routine.
 - Don't forget that problem solving is a big part of learning. School will not be perfect, but parents can offer support throughout the ups and the downs of school life.
- One last tip—don't forget to pick up a box of Kleenex (or tissues) for yourself just in case you get a little teary eyed as your little one walks through the classroom door.

Back-to-School Humor

"I won a prize in kindergarten today," a boy boasted to his mother. "My teacher asked me how many legs a hippopotamus has, and I said 'three.'" "Three?" asked his mother. "How on earth could you have won the prize?" "Because I came the closest," he answered. Art Linkletter

A child came home from his first day at school. His mother asked, "What did you learn today?" "Not enough," the child replied. "I have to go back tomorrow." Anonymous



A seven-year-old was giving his younger brother advice on starting school. "Whatever you do, don't learn to spell 'cat'—because if you do, after that the words just get harder and harder." Anonymous

When a kindergarten student was asked what she had learned the first day in school, she said, "First of all, I learned that my name isn't 'Pumpkin'—it's 'Karla.'" Anonymous

