

Appendix 6 (for Parents): Talking to Your Children and Having Them Talk to You

Ways to Convey the Book Material to Your Children

Below are my top ten ways to help relate the topics in this book to your children (or other young person for whom you care). Since no one knows your child better than you, choose what you believe will work best. Everyone's situation is different, and often complex.

1. Start on any chapter that interests you. Read it in its entirety, or just those pages or sections that are most important to you.
Any of the topics can arise with our children over a period of days, months, or years, so this book is intended to be an ongoing resource as new needs arise. In fact, it's probably best, and perhaps a necessity, that parents discuss the topics in this book with their kids over a period of weeks, months or even years.
2. I teach the book's concepts, as best I can, to my three sons in three different ways. One of my sons will read chunks of chapters, one will read only a page or two, or let me read it with him, and one refuses to read. Every child is different; you'll need to adapt to yours.
3. When trying to talk to my sons individually about the content of this book, I get in just two to three minutes of discussion, depending on the son, before I get shut down. Accordingly, I am always brief but to the point. For me, it's a necessity and less is often more.
4. What works today may not work tomorrow. Be flexible and adapt to the unique circumstances we all face.

5. I am not above “incentivizing” my sons, or taking a privilege away, to help facilitate the learning of what I believe are the most important parts of this book.
6. *Any* of the skills or advice you can convey, by hook or by crook, may serve them well. As you read through the book, what resonates with you is different from what resonates with others—we all take something different from each topic. Stay focused on what *you* think is most important. Even one thing they’re able to learn can be exactly the information they need in that moment that helps them or someone they care about.
7. Each chapter in this book provides a quiz you can give your teen or take yourself. If their score is less than 100 percent, have them learn the distinct portion(s) they missed. (To assist in this regard, the Answer Key in the print versions of this book has the page numbers where the correct information in the chapter is found.) Alternatively, regardless of how they do on a quiz, use it as a conversation starter.

Disclaimer: the quizzes are not intended to be difficult and are not a comprehensive review of the chapter materials.

8. I’ve found that lecturing doesn’t work well, particularly when we’re angry or annoyed. Asking open-ended questions by weaving in the book’s material and concepts is often a better strategy and lets your child lead the conversation—which many like to do. A real-life example from a news story can be a great way to start, and plenty of examples are spread throughout the chapters. A good time to talk with your kids is when their guard is down or at least lowered such as during a car ride, dinner, or going out for a treat. While these conversations can be awkward, an awkward conversation is better than no conversation.
9. Many times, it’s easier for our kids to talk to an adult who is not their parent. They also tend to give more credibility to information passed on from an adult who is not their parent. So find a “safe adult” to act as your surrogate. Offer to return the favor for their child.
10. Finally, have monthly, quarterly, or periodic family meetings—we do all three depending on how busy we are. I use a written agenda that’s distributed to the “attendees.” Each person gets to air any of their

gripes for one or two minutes. My wife Lisa and I then give kudos to each of our boys for something they've done well since the last meeting. We all then set a personal goal for the next month.

Finally, we get to "Dad's Safety Minute." During this part of the meeting, I cover in two minutes or less something from this book. You might be surprised how much I can cover in two minutes. Since my sons won't sit for long, each meeting lasts between ten and fifteen minutes.

Getting Your Children Talking to You in a Time of Need

The list above offers some good ways to start a talk with your kids, but *how can you get them to start a talk with you?* As parents and guardians, we'd like our children to first come to us when they're struggling or suffering.

Danielle Brooks, whom we met in the Introduction, is a clinical therapist who specializes in the treatment of families, children, and teens. She tells me that most of the young people she treats are "suffering but don't tell their parents the degree they are in pain. They are skeptical about trusting that adults can really understand and help them. But it is important to note that most teens either show their pain through acting-out behaviors or do a test-the-waters-minimal-feeling disclosure."

The common reason, explains Brooks, is "Many young people feel that adults don't understand their struggles, are judgmental, and just give them consequences." She continues by pointing out what should be obvious: "Why would they tell us [the parents] anything if we're just going to respond by giving them consequences?"

Brooks urges parents to communicate the message to their kids that "they're going to make mistakes all the time and it's because they're at the stage of development when it's about living and learning." She also suggests "not to lead with consequences and assure them that you'll always do your best to help them. If you aren't sure how, the two of you will navigate it together and find someone who will. We may not know what to do initially, and that's okay." Remember, none of us had to navigate many of the things our kids may have to—cyberbullying, social media pressures, maintaining your digital footprint, and so on.

Lisa and I do what Brooks advises: encourage our children to approach us in a time of need. I call it the "Forever Warranty." If they are in a time of need, they can come to either of us and we will help in the moment without asking any questions other than how we can help.

Brooks echoes this: “We need to let our children know that if they ever need us, we’ll be there no matter what.” Brooks deepened her explanation: “If our kids are afraid we will use what they tell us against them, then why would they tell us? It’s critical to establish a clear message to our children that if they come to us first versus us finding out from someone else, we won’t punish and we will focus on helping.” In summation, Brooks states her Golden Teen Parenting Rule: “When you need me, call me. No matter what the circumstances. I will help you and your freedom won’t be taken away and I won’t then micromanage your life. Just call me. I will help. No questions asked.”

Continuing with this theme, I would like to share a moment I had with Los Angeles County deputy district attorney Michael DeRose, introduced in chapter 6. He’s a veteran sex crimes prosecutor, and of all the interviews I conducted for this book, his stood out.

I was asking DeRose about the emotional toil it must take on him to prosecute sexual violence cases with minors as victims. His response surprised me: “Probably the most difficult part is watching parents blame their child for their victimization.” He often sees parents “get really upset with their kids.”

DeRose reflects on one of his cases in particular: “The victim was a really good kid, a good student. She had never been in trouble. And the perpetrator put her through hell. It really pained me to see how angry her parents were with her for engaging in risky sexual behaviors with the defendant that ultimately led to her victimization. I know that they had her best interests at heart, or at least thought they did, but that type of reaction did not serve her well.”

He adds: “We’ve all made mistakes as kids. It’s just that some mistakes weren’t available to our generation. If your child ever becomes a victim . . . react with empathy and support—be on and by their side. When they trust you, the more likely they will be to report their victimization early on so you can save them from further trauma.”