

Getting Your Kids to Talk to You Takes Tact

I'm a very verbal person, often needing to speak a few thousand words to ever get to my original point. My proneness to being verbal has also helped me immensely as a parent.

As a parent, it's always a challenge to get your kids to talk with you. Parents of younger kids will think, "What? I can't get my first-grader to stop talking!", but I'm talking about real-life conversations about important things. Do you give your kids the opportunity to have conversations with you?

Here are three foolproof ways to create an atmosphere of words in your home:

1. Set aside a time each day that conversation can actually take place. For the Cliff family, this is dinnertime (yes, we still sit together and eat dinner), and bedtime. At those times, we force our lives to slow down—or stop altogether—so that we can talk. The dinner conversations are family conversations, and the bedtime conversations are more personal in nature. This is a rhythm our family already has in place, and it's easy to make our word-friendly moments.

2. Capture stories worth telling your family. Recently, I talked with the kids about a news article I had read about a young man who got into some serious trouble because of where he was caught—even though he wasn't actually doing anything wrong. It wasn't meant to be dark, but it opened up tons of questions about the friends we keep. Because, ya know ... "Your friends determine the direction and quality of your life."

3. Ask questions at every conceivable opportunity. The story I referenced above led itself to tons of questions that I simply asked my kids and then sat back and listened to their responses. I'm not talking about "Why did you do that?" type

of questions. I'm suggesting the "What do you think about this?" with *this* being whatever you were telling them about.

I only have one piece of advice to parents everywhere. The best time to start these habits with your family is the day you bring your kids home from the hospital. Set that car seat up at the table, and talk to your spouse and the rest of the family.

It will be a few years before they can answer questions, but you are establishing rhythms that will last for years to come. All this is true, but the next best time to start is right now. If you missed the opportunity early on, then just start now and keep going.

I understand that some teenagers are less than willing to share in conversations with you, that's why I'd encourage you to just start where you are. If you have not established this, you will be coming from behind and you are definitely an underdog, but don't give up.

Find reasons to discover your teenagers' opinions and ideas on anything and everything you can!

Jonathan Cliff is the Director of Family Ministries at Athens Church in Athens, Ga. He is a huge advocate for the family and believes that the family is God's primary way of reaching the world. Cliff has been named one of the Top 20 kids' ministry leaders to watch by Children's Ministry Magazine and serves on the Board of Directors for the International Children's Ministry Network.

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