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**The Art Of Getting Your Kids To Talk To You**

**By Sintilia Miecevole**

Being a parent isn't easy. Some days just getting everyone in your family all together at the same time for dinner can seem like the "impossible dream". Between after school sports and clubs and working and errands and carpools, it's not surprising that almost half of the parents in a recent survey said they feel a growing distance between themselves and their children.

Today's children have more things to deal with than kids did even twenty years ago. Drugs, violence, mixed messages in advertising, peer pressure, packed schedules and outside activities all add to the pressure they face.

So how, in the midst of all this chaos, do you find time to talk to your kids -- and more importantly, have them talk back to you?

Here are several ideas that can help:

1. Eat dinner together as a family at least three times a week. Conversations flow easier when they happen around the dinner table. If your family is conversationally-challenged in the beginning, think of conversation starters before each meal. Plan a family vacation, letting each child talk about where they'd like to go, or what they'd like to do. Talk about current events, the latest movies or upcoming special events. Ask your children open-ended questions that have to be answered with more than yes or no.
2. Turn off the outside world. Set aside "family time" each night and have everyone turn off their phones, the computers and the television. Let your friends and extended family know that you won't be available during that time, and stick to it. Your kids (especially teenagers) may joke about it, but secretly they'll probably be delighted. Use this time to reconnect with each other. Watch a movie, play board games, take turns reading out loud, but whatever you do, do it together.
3. Cook at least one meal a week together. Even your youngest children can do something to help. If your kitchen is too small for everyone to fit, schedule a "helper" or have your children be responsible for different parts of the meal. Your family will grow closer during this time, and your kids may even

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start the conversations themselves. (You can always get the ball rolling by talking about things you did with your parents. While you may not be cool, chances are your kids think your parents are, and will be impressed).

4. Make it safe for your kids to talk to you. Let them know that you won't get angry or upset if they talk to you about what's going on. If they tell you something "off the record" then let it stay that way. (Emergencies and dangerous situations aside).

5. Listen to what they have to say. If you're working, or doing something else when your child starts to talk to you, they may give up if they know your attention is really somewhere else. Give them your undivided attention when they're speaking.

6. Use active listening skills. Make sure that you understand what your child is telling you. Repeat what they told you and ask questions.

7. Set aside special time to spend with each child. It may be nothing more than taking one child at a time with you when you run errands, but let each child know that you value spending special time with them.

8. Be patient. Don't expect a "perfect" family. If you're not June Cleaver and your husband isn't Howard Cunningham, it's okay. Just remember that perfect families really don't exist outside of television re-runs.

Just keep trying, and you'll learn the art of conversation with your kids isn't as hard as you thought!

Sintilia Miecevole, host of

<http://www.arbfamily.com>

has a most interesting resource site about family

including home, fun, genealogy, vacations, and planning to the family unit and reunions. Be sure to visit

<http://www.arbfamily.com>

and enjoy!

### **Ten Ways to Get Your Kids to Listen to You**

**By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC**

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There are times when every parent feels as if they might as well be talking to a block of wood. As with

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many other things, the harder you try to get your kids to listen, the more resistance you get. Here are ten things to consider when you want to get a message across:

1.) Make sure your relationship is solid.

If your kids don't like you, they're a lot less likely to listen to you.

2.) Remember that actions speak louder than words.

If your kids know that what you say won't be backed up with action, they'll more easily tune you out. Having natural consequences for not listening (toys disappear if kids don't listen and they're not picked up) has a way of having kids pay better attention.

3.) Talk about listening to them.

Make it a point to discuss the importance of listening occasionally when your kids are receptive. Talk about how nice it feels when someone else listens to you completely and what a great quality this is.

4.) Have a sense of timing when you talk to your kids.

Don't expect them to listen well when they're in the middle of something, when they're extremely tired, or when they're hungry. Find a time when they're reasonably relaxed and you have their full attention.

5.) Model great listening yourself.

Give them your absolute attention when they speak to you and try to reflect back what you heard so they can see how focused you were on what they were saying.

6.) Each child listens in a unique way, get to know their preferred style.

Your child may be a kinesthetic learner who listens and understands by writing something down or by walking through something. Find the way to reach your child in the way that works best.

7. Avoid Lectures

Many parents have a lecturing style that they're unaware of. Their kids are very aware of this style however, and tune them out. Speak in a casual and pleasant tone that you would use when talking with a friend

8. Limit their TV watching.

Kids who watch a lot of TV tend to be more easily distracted and have a more difficult time listening. This may also help to improve your relationship when you spend more time with your kids!

9. Talk to your kids in a non-judgmental way.

The more they feel judged by you, the more shame they'll feel and the less they'll hear. See your kids as great and they'll listen as though they are!

10. Be genuinely interested in your children's lives.

Ask them curious questions about what's they're experiencing. When your kids know that you have a real interest in their life, they're more likely to look forward to what you have to say.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is the author of "25 Secrets of Emotionally Intelligent Fathers" ([http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e\\_book.htm#secrets](http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e_book.htm#secrets). For more great tips and action steps for fathers, sign up for his FREE bi-weekly newsletter, "Dads, Don't Fix Your Kids," at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>



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