



Now with
information
on times
to connect

talk
+
play

CONNECT

Time with your kids... It adds up!

babies • toddlers • preschoolers • school-age • teenagers

Toolkit for Families

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Information about why talking and playing is so important
- Tips on how to talk to kids
- Book recommendations for parents and kids on talking and dealing with feelings
- Activities for you to do with kids - at any age!

talk + play

CONNECT

Parents and caring adults make such a difference in children's lives in so many ways. Two incredibly important ways that we can connect with our children are through talking to them and playing with them.

When you sing a lullaby to your baby, ask your toddler about what she sees out of the car window, talk to your preschooler about her favorite animal, have a conversation with your 5th grader about what she learned in school, or listen to your teenager's opinions on who is the best singer, you are bonding with your child through **talk**.

When you play peek-a-boo with your baby, throw a ball with your toddler, cook with your preschooler, play a board game with your 2nd grader, or shoot some hoops with your teenager, you are bonding with your child through **play**.

Talking and playing are two ways that parents can nurture and **connect** with their children. "As children grow, nurturing by parents and other caregivers remains important for healthy physical and emotional development. Parents nurture their older children by making time to listen to them, being involved and interested in the child's school and other activities, staying aware of the child or teen's interests and friends, and being willing to advocate for the child when necessary" (p. 12 of *Making Meaningful Connections* in www.childwelfare.gov/preventing).

Even spending just 10 minutes every day with your child, talking and playing with them, can make a difference in your child's life. When your child is going through a tough time, those special moments with you are even more important.

This toolkit is designed to give you more ideas about how to talk, play, and connect with your child. Most of the content of this toolkit came directly from various parenting web-sites. For more information about a topic, please visit the web-sites listed throughout this toolkit. You can also find more resources on talking and playing at www.yolokids.org/forfamilies.

Have fun together!



Time with your kids... It adds up!

Why talking to your kids is so important

Communicating with your children through talking and listening is important for many reasons. It improves your bond with them, encourages them to listen to you, and it helps them to form relationships and build self-esteem.

talking

The basics

Like so many other things, talking and listening can be done badly, just OK, or really well. And like any other skills, you get better with practice.

Good communication with children is about:

- encouraging them to talk to you – and listening so they can tell you how they feel
- being able to really listen and respond in a sensitive way to all kinds of things – not just nice things or good news, but also anger, embarrassment, sadness, or fear
- focusing on body language and actions as well as words, and interpreting nonverbal forms of communication.

Some children need a lot of encouragement and positive feedback to get talking. Others will be desperate to talk to you when you're busy doing something else. This might mean stopping what you're doing and listening.



Tips for talking and listening with your child

- **Set aside time for talking and listening to each other.**
- **Listen to your children when they want to talk, have strong feelings, or have a problem.**
- **Be open to talking about all kinds of feelings, including anger, joy, frustration, fear, and anxiety.** Talking about feeling angry is different from getting angry. Learning the difference is an important step for a child learning to communicate.
- **Let your child finish talking and then respond.** When listening, try not to jump in, cut your child off, or put words in your child's mouth – even when your child says something ridiculous or wrong or is having trouble finding the words. Children appreciate this as much as grown-ups!
- **Use language that your children will understand.** Sometimes we forget that children don't "get" everything.
- **Watch your child's facial expression and body language.** Listening isn't just about hearing words, but also trying to understand what's behind those words.
- **To let your child know you're listening, and make sure you've really understood, repeat back what your child has said and make lots of eye contact.**
- **Show your interest.** Say things such as, "Tell me more about ...", "Really!" and "Go on ...". Ask children what they feel about the things they're telling you about.
- **Avoid criticism and blame.** If you're angry about something your children have done, try and explain why you want them not to do it again. Appeal to their sense of empathy.

Children learn through their play

Playing

Don't underestimate the value of play. Through play, children learn and develop:

- cognitive skills – like math and problem solving in a pretend grocery store
- physical abilities – like balancing blocks and running on the playground
- new vocabulary – like the words they need to play with toy dinosaurs
- social skills – like playing together in a pretend car wash
- literacy skills – like creating a menu for a pretend restaurant.

Play is healthy.

Play helps children grow strong and healthy. It also counteracts obesity issues facing many children today.

Play reduces stress.

Play helps your children grow emotionally. It is joyful and provides an outlet for anxiety and stress.

Play is more than meets the eye.

Play is simple and complex. There are many types of play: symbolic, functional, and games with rules—to name just a few. Researchers study play's many aspects: how children learn through play, how outdoor play impacts children's health, the effects of screen time on play, and the need for recess in the school day.

Make time for play.

As parents, you are the biggest supporters of your children's learning. You can make sure they have as much time to play as possible during the day to promote cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development.



Play and learning go hand-in-hand.

They are not separate activities. They are intertwined. Think about them as a science lecture with a lab. Play is the child's lab.

Play outside.

Remember your own outdoor experiences of building forts, playing on the beach, sledding in the winter, or playing with other children in the neighborhood. Make sure your children create outdoor memories, too.

Trust your own playful instincts.

Remember as a child how play just came naturally? Give your children time for play and see all that they are capable of when given the opportunity.

times to connect

Every day brings new opportunities for you to connect with your child. Whether you connect through talking, playing, hugging, or reading to your child, these moments add up. They deepen your relationship with your child and strengthen the bond between you. The time you spend together also helps you to get along better and supports your child's growth and development.

Times to connect

Any time is a good time to connect with your child. However, there are three routine times during the day that are perfect occasions for you to talk, play, and connect with your child: in the morning, at mealtimes, and at bedtime.

Morning

Even though mornings can be rushed, it's great to start the day off right with a few moments of special connection with your child.

Mealtime

Eating a meal together gives you a perfect opportunity to slow down, talk, laugh, or play a little game with your child.

Bedtime

After the day is done, bedtime routines and conversations can calm your child before sleep and give you a chance to reconnect.

Making time

As you consider ways to connect with your child at these times during the day, think about how to make time for these special moments with your child. It might mean getting up a few minutes earlier in the morning or putting your phone down while you give your child your full attention. You might put aside a worry or a chore until after you spend a few minutes with your child. Try not to be rushed during the times you spend with your child. It's amazing how just a few minutes of quality time together can make a big difference in your relationship with your child.

Caring for yourself, too

Also remember that it is easier to enjoy time with your child when you have taken care of yourself. Spend a few minutes each day doing something that brings you joy or helps you feel calmer. You can read a book or magazine, go for a walk, talk to a friend or relative, watch a favorite program, find something that makes you laugh, or spend a few minutes breathing calmly and slowly. And if today didn't go well or if you weren't able to share special moments with your child, remember that tomorrow is a new day, full of fresh opportunities for you to talk, play, and connect with your child.

How to use this information

In the following pages, there are lots of ideas for ways to connect with your child. The first page for every age group gives talking tips and a few ideas for play. The second page presents quick, easy ideas for you to try during those three times of the day. To keep it simple, we alternate between referring to your child as "he" and "she" in this toolkit. Please know that all ideas can apply to both boys and girls!

**Read through the ideas and see which ones feel right to you and your family.
Try one of them out today!**

Talk + Play = CONNECT

Bonding with your baby through talking, singing, cuddling, and playing helps your child's future physical, social, and emotional development. The connection and attachment that you are developing with your baby will help your child feel loved and learn to trust, which will help your child show affection for and trust other people in the future.

babies

0-1
years

Talk!

- **Lots of parents feel silly talking to a little baby who doesn't talk back. But talking about what you're seeing and doing can really help your baby's development.** The main thing is to create a loving, happy feeling. The more you talk with your baby, the easier it becomes - and you'll be rewarded with your baby's responses.
- **Touch, cuddle and croon to babies as a first form of communication.** When babies cry, you can reassure them with your presence and a comforting, soothing tone. Babies respond to the emotions you are communicating through what they see, hear, and feel. They react to your sadness, tension, happiness, or satisfaction.
- **Turn baby talk into a two-way conversation.** Invite responses from your baby. Singing and chanting nursery rhymes are good ways to play with sound. They invite your baby to make a pleasing stream of sounds that eventually lead to talking.

Play!

- **Give a running commentary about what you're doing:** For example, "We're going to give you a nice warm bath now. You like your bath, don't you?" Talk in any language, or switch between different languages. It all helps your baby learn about words and talking.
- **Sing songs and rhymes:** This is a fun way to help your baby's language skills develop. In the car, in the bath, at bedtime - even if it's off-key. Your baby will love the rhythm of the words and will be soothed by your voice.
- **Read books and tell stories to your baby from birth:** After a few weeks, your baby will know that this is when you enjoy a quiet, special time together. Your baby will start to recognize words and learn to listen to what others say. If your baby cries or wriggles while you're reading, you might want to try again later. The idea is to have special time together, so there's no need to force the issue.
- **Listen to your baby's efforts at babbling and then respond:** Leave a gap when it's your baby's turn to talk again. This teaches your baby about the pattern of conversation. If your baby doesn't take a turn, or isn't interested in chatting right now, try again another time. Let your baby's interest and responses guide you.
- **Name the toys and objects around you:** For example, "Look, these are your socks. We're going to put them on your feet, aren't we?"



TALK: http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/agebyage_2.html

PLAY: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/newborn_talking.html/context/277

TIMES TO CONNECT

Even though your baby can not talk yet, every moment you spend with her is a chance to help her grow and develop while you show her how much you love her!

babies

0-1
years

Morning

- **Cuddle your baby** for a few minutes after you get her out of bed. Your baby loves to be held by you!
- **During diaper changes, talk to your baby** about what you're doing and about what is going to happen next. Your baby doesn't understand your words yet, but she will soon.
- **Once you have fed and changed your baby, play with her for a few minutes.** You can read a book, play pat-a-cake or peek-a-boo, or show her an interesting toy. She loves to hear your voice, so talk or sing to her.



Mealtime

- **Whether you are nursing or bottle-feeding, snuggle your baby** to show him how much you love him.
- **If your baby is eating solid foods, sit with him and talk** about the food and what he is doing. Respond to him when he coos or interacts with you.

Bedtime

- **Develop a bedtime routine to help your baby calm down and get ready for sleep.** Choose a routine that is right for you and your baby. You can include a bath, books, snuggles, songs, and stories.¹
- **Experiment with ways to soothe your baby when she is fussy.** After you have tried feeding, changing, and burping her, here are some other ideas that might help calm your baby down:
 - Hold, massage, or swaddle your baby. Give lots of hugs and kisses.
 - Use white noise from a vacuum cleaner, dishwasher, or fan to calm your baby.
 - Rock your baby, walk with your baby, or take your baby on a stroller or car ride. Movement can sometimes soothe babies. Carrying your baby in a sling might help. Going outside sometimes calms babies, too.
 - Give your baby something to suck, like your clean finger, a pacifier, or their own fingers or thumb.
 - Sometimes babies just won't calm down no matter what you try. If you find yourself starting to get frustrated with your baby, put her down in a safe place and take a break to calm yourself. Come back to her when you're calmer and try something new.²

1: www.babycenter.com/0_establishing-a-bedtime-routine-with-your-baby_1507759.bc
2: www.purplecrying.info/sub-pages/soothing/common-sense-and-well-tried-soothing-methods.php

Talk + Play = CONNECT

Although toddlerhood can be a time of conflict as your toddler struggles for independence from you, it is also a wonderful time for you to connect with your toddler. By talking and playing with your toddler, you can help them learn to put words to what they're feeling, bond with them, giggle with them, and watch them grow and learn before your eyes.

toddlers

1-3 years

Talk!

- **Turn body language into words:** Listening and talking to toddlers is as much about reading what they're saying with their bodies as it is about hearing their words. Your toddler isn't just listening to your words but also reading your gestures, facial expressions and the tone of your voice. While children are learning how to talk and coming to grips with their emotions, they will also rely on other means to tell you what they're thinking and feeling. Stuck for words, a toddler will use actions to communicate needs and wants. For example, you child might tug on your pants to be picked up, shake or nod the head, and use distinctive gestures to tell you to "go away."
 - When your toddler relies on body language, you can help with talking by repeating back what you think your child wants and explaining your response as you go. For instance, "You want to be picked up, but mommy's got something in her hand, so you can hold my other hand?" or "I can see you don't want that. What about this?"
- **Help your toddler assert herself:** As the main theme of toddlerhood is one of asserting the self (think: No! Me! Mine! Now!), toddlers respond best to language that is about them and the exciting new idea that they can control the world.
 - One tactic is to give your toddler choices. For example, "It's going to be cold. Would you rather wear your red scarf or your blue scarf?" rather than "Put your scarf on – it's cold." This approach gives toddlers a sense of being in control and the satisfaction of having their opinions valued.
- **Help children understand:** As grown-ups, we sometimes forget that children don't understand everything we say. If your toddler seems puzzled when you say something:
 - Try saying it in different ways.
 - Look at the tone in your voice. Just like babies, toddlers will respond to the tone in your voice as much as to the content of the words.

Play!

- **Sing:** Even if you don't have a great voice, your child won't notice. Sing songs you know or make up ones about things like getting dressed or brushing your teeth or cleaning up!
- **Read:** Your child will love cuddling up and listening to books with you. Visit the library for new ones!
- **Play with blocks:** Build towers and knock them down! Count the blocks as you stack them.
- **Play with a ball:** Kick, roll, throw, or bounce the ball between you outside. For indoor fun, roll or bounce one or more balls in a hallway with the doors closed.
- **Go to the park:** Let your child lead, count how many steps they climb, or sing a song as you push them on the swing.
- **Go for a walk:** Talk about what you see, hear, and feel.
- **Kitchen fun:** Get out your plastic containers, a pot or two, and wooden spoons and let your toddler bang and make music in your kitchen!



TIMES TO CONNECT

Your toddler is growing so fast and learning so much! When you take time to talk and play with him throughout the day, you teach him about the world while showing him that you are interested in him and all of the new things he is learning.

toddlers 1-3 years

Morning

- **Help your child wake up with warm hugs and cuddles.**
- **Talk about the day** and what is going to happen. Toddlers love knowing what to expect.
- **Build a few minutes of play time into the morning if you can.** Read a book to your toddler, race cars down the hall, get a doll or animal ready for the day, or spend a few minutes doing a puzzle together.
- **Give choices that are limited to help the morning go more smoothly.** This gives your child the chance to practice some independence by making small decisions, while still giving you control over the big decisions! For example, ask, “Do you want cereal or eggs?” instead of “What do you want for breakfast?”¹

Mealtime

- **When your toddler says a word or two, respond by building sentences around what she said.** For example, if she says the word “red,” you can respond, “Both the apple and the tomato are red. Do you see something else that is red?”²
- **Label your toddler’s emotions to help her start to recognize them.** “You’re excited Grandma is eating dinner with us” or “You’re mad we’re not having pasta for lunch.”²



Bedtime

- **Keep a regular bedtime routine.** Knowing what to expect helps toddlers calm down from the day and can help the evening go more smoothly. A routine can also be a great way for you to bond with your toddler. However, even toddlers with bedtime routines often don’t want to go to bed. Hang in there and take deep breaths while your toddler practices being independent! Some ideas for things to include in the bedtime routine are:
 - bath time (and playing with toys in the bath)
 - brushing teeth
 - singing a song (one you already know or one you make up!)
 - reading books (ask your toddler questions about the pictures in the story)
 - telling a story about what happened during the day and what your toddler did. Because toddlers love to hear about themselves, make your toddler the star of the show! As he learns more words, he can start to contribute to the story.
 - snuggling and tucking your toddler in bed.³

1: www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=691

2: www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/resources/chattingmeal

3: www.babycenter.com/0_bedtime-rituals-best-bets_1292649.bc

Talk + Play = CONNECT

Your preschooler is growing up so fast, learning so much, and developing more sophisticated language every day. While your preschooler may seem really mature in some ways, she still craves your attention and wants your help to figure out what is going on inside her body and mind and in the world around her. What a gift you can give her by talking to and playing with her!

preschool 3-5 years

Talk!

- **Give your preschooler your full attention.** Even a quick but focused connection may fill your child's need for communication. If she says, "Play with me," and you are not available, you might explain why or say, "I had a hard day at work today. I need three minutes to change. Then I can play with you." Preschoolers can understand your feelings — to a point — and will appreciate your honesty.
- **Help your preschooler develop emotional awareness.** Even if there is misbehavior — you can talk about it together. Most preschoolers can understand a sentence like, "Sometimes, I get mad, too. It helps me to go into another room and take some deep breaths."
- **Create safe opportunities for preschoolers to express their BIG feelings.** For example, if your child is extremely angry, instead of saying, "Stop yelling," you might say, "Go in the bathroom and scream as loud as you can for one minute."
- **Don't over-explain.** Simple explanations may be more effective than long discussions. If your preschooler is having a tantrum, holding her close — or just staying nearby — may mean more than any words you can say.

Play!

- **Nature Scavenger Hunt:** Grab a bag, head outside, and go for a walk! Have your child put leaves, twigs, flowers, and other objects from nature in the bag. Ask questions about what your child sees, feels, and hears. Ask open-ended questions: "What did you find? Oh, a bug? What does it look like? How does it move?" You do not have to know all the answers to children's questions. Discuss what you see—the shape of leaves, the color of the soil, the movement of the grasses. Your child can learn to discover through observing. Back at home, you can help your child make a nature collage with the objects you collected and paper and glue.
- **Help with chores:** Have your child help put away groceries, set the table, sort, match and fold laundry! Chat with them about the chore (e.g., what type of food they're putting away, where the fork goes, what color socks they are matching).
- **Preschoolers love to help with food preparation:** Ask your child to help with measuring, mixing, and pouring. Talk about changes in foods as you prepare them ("How did it look before we mixed it? When we mixed it? When we cooked it?"). Help your children compare the before and after. Ask your child to smell food, taste safe food, and tell you what they think. Talk about opposites like big and small, hard and soft. Let your children pour water with spoons, cups, and pitchers.



TALK: http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/agebyage_4.html

PLAY: <http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/music-math-more/explore-great-outdoors-your-child>

TIMES TO CONNECT

Life with your busy, talkative preschooler can be so much fun! Even though she is curious about everything around her, spending time with you is still one of her favorite activities.

preschool 3-5 years

Morning

- **Help your child wake up with warm hugs and cuddles.**
- **Talk about what your child is going to do today.** Preschoolers love knowing what to expect.
- **Build a few minutes of play time into the morning if you can.** Draw a picture with your preschooler, read a book together, pretend to be animals, or play hide-and-seek for a few minutes.
- **Give choices that are limited to help the morning go more smoothly.** This gives your child the chance to practice some independence by making small decisions, while still giving you control over the big decisions! For example, ask, “Should we walk or skip to the car?” instead of “Are you ready to go?”¹

Mealtime

- **Ask your child what he did or learned today.** Show interest in what he has to say by asking questions and giving him your full attention when he is talking.²
- **Play guessing games** like “I Spy,” in which each family member gets an opportunity to “spy” something that can be seen from the dinner table. Others ask questions to guess what it is.³
- **Use this time to talk about emotions, both positive and negative.** Ask, “How did you feel when that happened?” Label the emotions your child shows, like sad, mad, frustrated, and excited. Explain that you also have felt these emotions, and talk about different ways to handle difficult emotions and situations.²

Bedtime

- **Make clean up time a game.** Race to see who can pick up the most blocks or set a timer for 3 minutes and see how much you can pick up together before the timer goes off.
- **Enjoy that special time that you spend with your preschooler during the bedtime routine.** Some ideas for things you can do together include bath time, brushing teeth, reading books, singing songs, cuddling, and tucking your child into bed.⁴
- **Because preschoolers love to hear stories, tell a story about something that happened during the day or a story about your child or your family from the past.** Don't be surprised if your preschooler wants to add details or wants to hear the same story over and over again!⁵



1: www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=691

2: www.health.ny.gov/prevention/nutrition/resources/chattingmeal

3: www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/

4: www.webmd.com/parenting/guide/make-your-kids-bedtime-battle-free

5: www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/agebyage_3.html

Talk + Play = CONNECT

Although school-age children are more influenced by their peers and the world beyond you, you still have an incredible amount of power to guide them. It's so important to connect and communicate your love and values to your school-age child through conversations and quality time together.

Talk!

- **Find time to talk.** With a school-age child, you won't have as many opportunities for conversation as you did with your preschooler. As your child grows up, she may turn to you less frequently, so you may need to make a special effort to spend time together.
- **Speak to your school-age child in a mature fashion.** School-age kids want their "bigness" acknowledged. They may be offended if they feel they are being spoken to like babies (even if they happen to be acting like them). You might say, "I expect you to begin your book report. What time would you like to work on it?" instead of "How many times do I have to tell you to do your book report!"
- **Listen to your school-age child without contradicting her.** Instead of saying "That's ridiculous," you might simply say, "Hmm," or "Really." Then, ask specific questions based on the situation your child has described.
- **Repeat what you heard your child say, but in a more mature way.** You can reflect her statement in the form of a question, implying, "Am I getting this right?" In this way, you are respecting your child's intelligence, making her feel understood and encouraging her to tell you more. You might say, "So, you think your gym teacher is stupid, but you don't want me to intervene? Can you tell me what you are upset about?"
- **Keep talking even if your school-age child won't talk to you.** "You will feel at times that you have lost your credibility with a school-age child," comments Michael Thompson, Ph.D. "If you take silence or impulsive remarks personally, things can go quite badly. But they are often simply trying to establish their independence."

Play!

- **Board games, puzzles, and card games:** School-age kids love playing games. Board games and card games are great for challenging young minds and creating hours of indoor fun. Or exercise those creative, cognitive and problem-solving muscles with a good puzzle. You can use a store-bought variety or have the kids make their own. Have your children draw a picture on a sturdy piece of cardboard or Bristol board. Then use a pencil to outline puzzle pieces directly on their drawing. Cut out the pieces with a good pair of scissors, mix them up and get solving.
- **Dance Party!** Put on some great music and dance together around the house! Or you can play Freeze! Ask your kids to dance until the music stops. When it does, they have to freeze in whatever position they find themselves in – even if they have one leg up. To make the game more challenging, ask the kids to freeze in specific poses: animals, shapes, letters or even yoga postures.
- **Treasure hunt:** Kids love finding hidden objects — especially when there's a prize at the end. Simply write your clues on some slips of paper — get creative. Place the first clue somewhere easy to find, like inside your child's snack or cereal bowl. Then leave as many clues as you like around the house, making a trail to the final clue, where you can put a prize, a snack, or a special note.

school-age
5-12
years

TIMES TO CONNECT

Although your school-age child is spending more time and energy on school and friends, you still have wonderful opportunities to interact with him throughout the day. Take advantage of these times to convey your values, share some fun, and show him that you love him!

School-age 5-12 years

Morning

- **Talk about what will be happening today.** Let your child know about any surprises or unexpected events he may not be anticipating. We all do better when we know what to expect!
- **Include notes, jokes, or drawings in your child's lunch box or backpack** to let your child know you're thinking about him.
- **In addition to giving reminders, try to spend a few minutes connecting with your child in the morning before school.** You can give your child a hug, chat for a few minutes over breakfast, or ask what he is excited about doing today.



Mealtime

- **Build in fun ways to review the day or have a conversation during dinner.** These can become routines that your family shares. Some ideas include:
 - Two truths and a lie: Have your child tell 3 things (two true and one lie) that happened during the day. You have to figure out which one is the lie!
 - Choose one or two questions for everyone to answer during dinner. What are you thankful for? What are you looking forward to tomorrow? What's the funniest or strangest thing that happened to you today? If you could be any character in a book or movie, who would you be and why? ¹
- **Turn off electronics** (TV, phones, computers) during meals so that you can all focus on talking and reconnecting as a family.
- **Play 20 questions during dinner.** To play, one person chooses an animal or object, and other family members ask yes or no questions to try to figure out what it is. For example, ask, "Is it an animal?" or "Do we have one of them in our house?"

Bedtime

- **Even though your school-age child is now much more independent, make sure to check in with her at the end of the day with things like:**
 - a few minutes of snuggle time
 - a hug and a kiss during tuck-in time
 - reading a book together. You can read her a book or she can read one to you when she knows how to read!
 - spelling out a special good-night message on her back, like "Sweet dreams" or "I love you."
 - keeping a journal together where you each write notes or draw pictures to each other. It's a great way to connect, but it's also a way to learn more about what your child is thinking! Your child can ask questions and share concerns or just be silly with you.²

1: www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/tag/ages-8-13

2: www.parenting.com/article/bedtime-rituals-for-big-kids

Talk + Play = CONNECT

Good communication — talking and listening — with your teenager may be the most important part of your relationship. Since teens are forming their own identity and testing limits, some conversations may lead to disagreements and become uncomfortable. Your goal is to have open, respectful, and honest conversations. Teens need to feel loved and that their point of view is respected, even when you disagree.

teenagers

13+
years

Talk!

- **Be a good listener.** If your teen is willing to share something — anything — accept it for the precious and rare moment it is. Unless the house is on fire, stop and listen nonjudgmentally. Rule of thumb: Listen twice as much as you speak.
- **Respect her privacy.** If she sees that you understand her need for private phone calls and a closed bedroom door, she may be more willing to try sharing some of her inner world with you.
- **Give her increasing autonomy.** If she believes that you trust her judgment and understand her need for growing independence, she is more likely to talk with you when real issues arise.
- **Accept all of her feelings,** as long as they are respectfully conveyed.
- **Apologize when you are wrong.**
- **Be brief.** When you speak to her, keep your comments brief. Schedule time to talk about unappealing topics, such as homework — don't catch her on the fly. Focus on what she got right, before offering constructive criticism.
- **Avoid lecturing, nagging, and guilt trips.**

Play!

- **Once every couple weeks, offer to take your teenager out for a meal on the way to or from another activity.** This will give you 1:1 time with them consistently and does not require them to miss out on other events with friends.
- **Mothers and daughters can go together to get manicures or pedicures.** Schedule a time where you can go at the same time and sit side by side so that you are talking during your time at the salon.
- **If you share a common hobby or interest with your teenager, this is a great way to spend time with them.** Playing baseball, tennis, or volleyball is a great way for parents to spend time with their teenagers. If you both enjoy reading or art, you can go visit the library or shop for books or supplies together.
- **Use car time as a way of spending time with your teenager.** If you are driving them to an appointment or to a friend's house, try to use this time to talk to them in a casual manner so that they know you are available to them rather than having car rides in silence or with the radio turned up most of the time.
- **Schedule a family game night (or allow your teenager to invite a friend also).** This is a stretch for many teens, but some teenagers truly enjoy such events. Teens often enjoy sitting in the comfort of their home and playing games they enjoy with people who do not judge them. It's worth trying!
- **Have one special meal together each week.** Maybe make it together, plan it together, or go shopping for it together also.

TALK: <http://psychcentral.com/lib/how-to-talk-with-your-teenagers-not-at-them/000528>

PLAY: <https://howtoparentateen.wordpress.com/tag/teen-activities>

CONNECT: <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Talking-With-Your-Teen-Tips-For-Parents.aspx>

TIMES TO CONNECT

Your teenager is getting more independent every day, but she still wants and needs your guidance and love. Connecting with your teen throughout the day by talking and finding things to share can strengthen your relationship and reduce conflict.

teenagers 13+ years

Morning

- **Mornings are really hard for teenagers.** Teenage bodies want to go to sleep late and wake up late, so it may be a challenge to get your teen to wake up in time for school, let alone have a conversation with you. Remember this may not be because she is stubborn, but may be because of her biology. Many of the things that can help the morning go more smoothly actually involve helping your teen go to bed earlier. (Read more in the bedtime section.) Stay calm and show her you understand how hard this is. Involve her in problem-solving discussions, even as you set limits and guide her.



Mealtime

- **Try to share as much meal time with your teen as possible, even though it may be hard to prioritize.** It doesn't matter which meal or where or when you eat, but try to make time for this special opportunity to talk and listen to your teen.¹
- **Keep meals interesting by choosing one or two questions for everyone to answer.** What is the most caring thing you've ever done? If you were stranded on a desert island, what three things would you bring? What is your favorite family tradition?²
- **Turn off electronics** (TV, phones, computers) during meals so that you can all focus on talking and reconnecting as a family.

Bedtime

- **Give your teen a hug and say "I love you" every day.** Your child is never too old to hear that you love him.³
- As discussed in the morning section, it can be hard for teens to fall asleep because of their biology. **Help your teen figure out how to fall asleep more easily** with these tips:
 - Go to sleep and wake up at roughly the same time on week nights and weekends.
 - Have a quiet routine, such as reading, before going to sleep.
 - Turn off all electronics, including phones, at least one hour before sleep. Light from electronics can make it hard to fall asleep.
- **Be prepared to have a conversation with your teen whenever he wants to have one.** Teens don't always pick the most convenient times for us to have deep discussions, but by being available and not rushed all of the time, you open yourself up for some great conversations—especially in the car or late at night.⁵

1: www.ahaparenting.com/parenting-tools/family-life/dinner-connected-family

2: www.thefamilydinnerproject.org/tag/ages-14-100

3: www.ahaparenting.com/ages-stages/teenagers/tips-bond-close-teen

4: www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2014-8-26-starved-sleep-10-tips-helping-sleep-deprived-teens

5: www.webmd.com/parenting/features/better-communication-with-teens?page=2

Books for Parents

There are so many books and resources out there for parents to learn more about how to communicate effectively with their children. While we've included some information in this toolkit on the topic, here are a few books to check out if you'd like some additional information.

- *Between Parent and Child: The Bestselling Classic That Revolutionized Parent-Child Communication* by Dr. Haim Ginott, Dr. Alice Ginott, and Dr. H. Wallace Goddard
- *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
- *How to Talk So Teens Will Listen & Listen So Teens Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish
- *How to Talk to Your Kids About Really Important Things: Specific Questions and Answers and Useful Things to Say* by Charles E. Schaefer and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo
- *Parent Effectiveness Training: The Proven Program for Raising Responsible Children* by Thomas Gordon
- *Raising a Thinking Child: Help Your Young Child to Resolve Everyday Conflicts and Get Along With Others: The 'I Can Problem Solve' Program* by Myrna B. Shure
- *Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child: The Heart of Parenting* by John Gottman, Joan Declaire, Danie Goleman

Books for Children

The world of emotions can be so confusing for children. One minute they are excited and jumping off the walls, the next something happens and they are so furious that they want to scream. By reading picture books about emotions and labeling feelings for your child, you can help your child start to understand what is going on in his body and mind and learn how to deal with the emotions in a healthy way. Here are a few books to share with your child.

Picture Books about Feelings for Children:

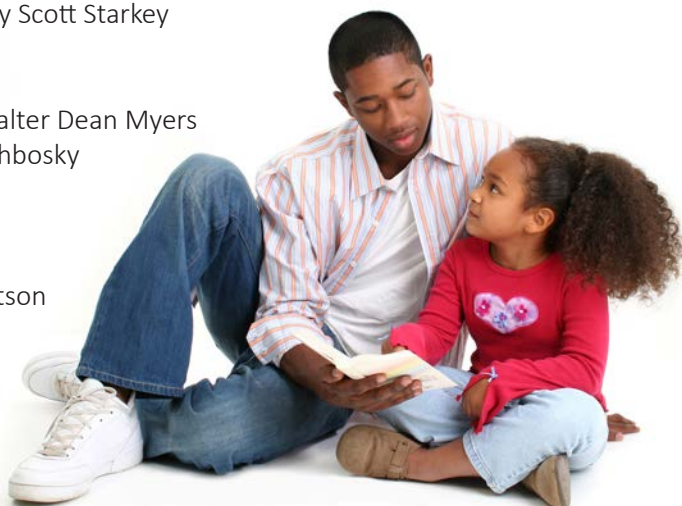
- *When Sophie Gets Angry - Really, Really Angry...* by Molly Bang
- *Way I Feel Books* (e.g., *When I Feel Sad*, *When I Feel Worried*, *When I Feel Good About Myself*) by Cornelia Maude Spelman and Kathy Parkinson
- *The Chocolate-Covered-Cookie Tantrum* by Deborah Blumenthal
- *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by Judith Viorst
- *Hurty Feelings* by Helen Lester
- *The Story of My Feelings* by Laurie Berkner
- *The Pigeon Has Feelings, Too!* by Mo Willems
- *Wemberly Worried* by Kevin Henkes

Children's Novels on Feelings:

- *Half a World Away* by Cynthia Kadohata
- *Runt* by Nora Raleigh Baskin
- *Stop the Presses!* by Rachel Wise
- *After the River the Sun* by Dia Calhoun
- *How to Beat the Bully Without Really Trying* by Scott Starkey

Teen Novels on Feelings:

- *What They Found: Love on 145th Street* by Walter Dean Myers
- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- *Fifteen* by Beverly Cleary
- *Hush* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *You Don't Know Me* by David Klass
- *Instructions for a Broken Heart* by Kim Culbertson



For more book recommendations, please visit yolokids.org/forfamilies or visit your local library!