

12 TIPS FOR Heart-to-Heart Conversations

Some conversations are tougher than others. It may be the topic that needs to be discussed, the way you believe the other person will react or both. But these are often the most important conversations you have with your kids. They may feel awkward, but they're the ones that make the biggest impact.

So, where does a parent begin? How can you have a meaningful discussion on a tough topic that results in mutual dialogue and closeness, not chaos and being shut out?

It may not be as impossible as it seems! The tips below will help you set the right atmosphere, manage emotions and create a safe space for both of you to talk, heart-to-heart. Remember, families and kids are unique. These tips aren't meant as a checklist, but as guidelines. Tailor your conversation to what works best for your family and your kids.

- 1 Make sure you're both ready.** Let them know when you want to talk. No surprises! This can also help you come from a calmer place, so you can model appropriate communication.
- 2** If you're not sure how to begin, **look for organic opportunities!** When the topic comes up in movies or on TV, that's a natural way to approach it.
- 3 Prepare yourself.** Chat with your spouse, coworker or friend. Parents can feel nervous about hard conversations, just like kids. That's okay! Practicing how you want to communicate helps.
- 4 Choose neutral ground,** like the car, where constant eye contact isn't needed. **Start fresh without assumptions.** Simply ask, "What do you know about this?" or "How do you feel about this?"
- 5 Be patient** and give them the time they need to say what they want to say. **Practice active listening** and repeat what you hear. This ensures you're understanding their perspective.
- 6 Be honest and sincere.** A true heart-to-heart requires trust. Kids recognize when others are not being open and honest, and often close down as a result.
- 7 Set boundaries and stay focused!** If either of you pulls in past issues, calmly state that you want to first focus on the topic at hand. You can discuss other issues later.
- 8 Validate feelings and have empathy.** Kids see the world differently than adults, and meeting them where they are will help them open up. Avoid interrupting and shaming.
- 9** When discussing the topic, **use "I feel..." statements** and avoid "You always..." or "You never..." statements. Gently guide them to do the same.
- 10** Kids often see issues as bigger than adults do. **Acknowledge their feelings and help them build perspective.** Social issues in ninth grade may seem overwhelming, but it changes. **Give them hope!**
- 11 Don't overreact** to any stress-induced drama. They may need to stomp out and go to their room for a while. Calmly let them know you'll return to talking when they are in a better place.
- 12 Follow up** after the conversation. You may be very surprised – many kids, after time to process, feel relieved after a heart-to-heart. It can also build deeper trust between the two of you.

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