

# THE TWO-WAY CONVERSATION

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I wonder if we really grasp the significance of two-way conversations with our kids? Much of our time is spent talking **at** them rather than enjoying their contributions and seeking out their opinions. Maybe it is because we spend so much of the early training years telling them what to do, we don't realize the point at which our kids begin to think for themselves, and have valuable input into our conversations.

The best way to get kids to talk to you is to create time for it to happen. Kids will know they are really being listened to when we stop what we are doing, sit down, eyeball them, and act like we have nothing else to do. Kids always know when we are not really listening. It has something to do with the lack of enthusiastic response like 'ah-huh!' My daughter says to me, "Mom, I know you are thinking about something else. What did I just say?" Fortunately I can always repeat what she just said, but I have to admit that my brain is often multi-tasking and I am not giving her my full attention.

When we don't listen, kids can feel like we don't care and may give up talking to us. They will often go elsewhere for that sympathetic ear they need. The sympathetic ear may not always be attached to someone we would want our child to have a relationship with. If we don't listen, we lose valuable opportunities to guide them and, unfortunately, in some instances they will close us out.

Here are some times, places, and opportunities we have found that stimulate two-way conversations with our kids. When kids first come home from school they often like to just sit quietly and unwind. Let them do that for 10 minutes or so. If you are home, then chat with them over a snack with the TV off. It's a great time for kids to recount the day's events.

Eating at the family table together is the perfect time to support and encourage one another by sharing accomplishments and concerns. The family table needs to be positive and not a time to deal with disciplinary matters. Even if a child is misbehaving at the table the parent needs only to quietly remove the child so the rest of the family can enjoy positive table talk. If you make dinnertime a place for listening to one another, then you will find kids won't want to miss out on this regular event. As mentioned in a previous article, by sitting at the family table for meals, without the TV on, kids are far less likely to get into trouble. Why is this? I believe it is because by sharing together, individuals feel they have value. They talk about issues and how to handle them. They know they have the support of the family.

There are many other opportunities to listen to your kids. Take them out, one by one on a date – a special time with a parent. Do what they want to do and talk about what they want to talk about. Make it quantity and quality time.

Going to the movies, the library, a ball game, or watching TV together are good for building positive relationships. However, if you want to have fruitful conversations make sure you pick activities where you can talk. Go to the park. Go to a café or other eating establishment. Sit down by a lake, a river, or the beach. Go fishing. Walk a hiking track. Talk about serious and frivolous things. Let the kids express themselves. You need to know what they are thinking, and as they get into their later teens accept that they may see things differently than you do.

The important thing is to ground them in strong family values so that when others present them with opinions that differ from their own, their family values will help them to make wise responses.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at [sally@forefrontfamilies.org](mailto:sally@forefrontfamilies.org). We invite you to also check out our website at [www.forefrontfamilies.org](http://www.forefrontfamilies.org) and our blog site at [www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com](http://www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com) for further assistance.