

Talking Age-By-Age

From the book, *Time to Parent*

Chapter 9: Relate

Infant (0-1)

Follow your infant's attention and name the things that captivate them. "Do you see the lamp switch? That's how we turn on the lights." When you go outside, and she looks up at a tree, "Oh, that's a squirrel. Squirrels have fluffy tails and eat nuts. I wonder if it lives in that tree?" Leave a gap when it's your baby's turn to talk again. This teaches your baby about the pattern of conversation. Coos, babbles and gurgles are an infant's version of language, so respond to their "words" with your words.

Toddler (1-3)

Play sports commentator on their discoveries. Toddlers are amazing learners. They are discovering that they can change the way the world works. Narrating their play is a great way to help young children understand how language can describe actions. You can even ask questions like, "What will you do next?" Or, "I see you put the ball inside the jar. Is there another way to do that?"

Pre-School (3-5)

Reflect together on shared experiences. An example, "Remember when we went to the park and we had a picnic and then played on the swings? And then when it started to rain, we went to get ice cream and that was fun, too?" Let the child consider the order in which things happened, why things happened the way they did, and what the experience meant. Consider writing or drawing these stories as a way of creating permanent memories.

School Age (5-10)

Have a daily debrief. At school, your child is busy learning, making friends and tackling daily challenges. Talking about what's happening in their lives when you are apart is tremendously bonding, and helps them feel cared for, understood and secure. You can help your child develop empathy and understand different points of view by getting him to describe his own feelings and by talking about other people's feelings, e.g. Why do you think that made Sally sad? A daily dialogue puts you in the best position to guide and support them in all circumstances.

Tween (10-13)

Make it safe to talk about the tough stuff. Keep the lines of communication open as the tough topics come up: bullying, sexual orientation, drugs, alcohol, academic competition. Adopt a poker face. Avoid being critical or judgmental or even looking alarmed. Just listen. Mirror back what they are saying, and clarify your understanding: "is that what you mean?" Then empathize: "That's a good point." "That sounds like it was very painful." Often empathy is all kids (and grownups!) need to feel whole.

Teen (13-18)

Engage in philosophical talk. This is a point at which kids are exploring different ways of looking at the world on the road to identity formation. If they are less willing to talk about details of their own lives, consider discussing the news, or engaging in philosophical talk. Approach subjects with curiosity. Be willing to discuss a topic from all perspectives – the exploration may stretch your mind, too.