

Ways to Get Your Tween or Teen to Talk with You

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Ask your tween or teen any question these days, and they are likely to reply with a vague grunt or the nonchalant shoulder shrug. Dare to start a dialogue with them, and you'll be met with the notorious eye roll, am I right? As difficult as it may seem, children in the tween and teen stage still need positive connections with their parents. Parents need to keep in mind that it may take a few inventive and creative tactics to get that connection started. Don't give up! Here are a few strategies that have worked for me:

Coca-Cola Tic Tacs

I have a candy stash in a drawer next to my desk. But not just any candy – it has to be high quality candy, not the kind kids get trick-or-treating or going on egg hunts. These special sweets are usually ones kids

wouldn't spend their own money to buy and yet they crave. I'm talking about the toasted hazelnut with crispy wafer covered in chocolate, the gourmet jelly beans, candies in Asian flavors that are usually imported, and yes, the Coca-Cola Tic Tac (these are highly coveted in my household!).

I let my kids know that they are welcome to have one of these candies every so often – they just need to come and ask me for permission. Naturally, kids come in a happy mood when they want one of those candies! I take that perfect opportunity to ask how they are doing and what they are up to. If they are sullen, I use that time to provide a listening ear and give some comfort. I keep the conversation short, but do request an honest and courteous response from my kids. Then, they get a candy and both of us are satisfied – I've received an honest answer from them, and we both enjoyed a candy together. I enjoy keeping up this sweet habit.

Car Dates

These days, it's really hard to carve out one-on-one time with each child, so I try to create a win-win situation by taking one child with me to run errands (for example, going grocery shopping or going to Target). Since this child is my sole passenger, they get to sit in the front seat and they get to choose which radio station we listen to. While completing the errand, I always ask this child for their input and suggestions (like meal suggestions). These simple privileges make them feel special and they might even lower down their guard, even if it is for a short ride. During this "car

date,” I always make small talk because you never know when it’ll provide the opportunity for a deeper conversation. For example, I remember shopping for deodorant when my daughter told me about a related, embarrassing situation, which then led to a conversation about hygiene, which then led to a conversation about healthy body image. These deeper conversations don’t always happen, but I am happy when they do!

Check-Ins

When my kids were younger, we used to read bedtime stories with them before they were tucked in for the evening. These days, we use a more “grown up” version for our middle schoolers. Much like a check-in that a parent would have at work with their supervisor, my children also prefer weekly check-ins. A weekly check-in consists of open-ended questions that are good for reflection and goal setting. Always end the talk on a positive note. Some of our discussions and affirmations are around one or more of these questions:

What was one positive thing that worked out for you this past week?

What is something new that you learned?

Did anything surprise you this past week?

How are you feeling about _____?

How are you getting along with your sibling(s) and friends?

Do you have a goal or practice (e.g. academic, physical, social, spiritual) that you want to adjust or improve?

What could I do to support you in achieving your

goals?

What are some of your tricks and tips? Do share!

Jaime

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