

## Back To School: Talking With Your Kids

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*To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others.* —Pope Saint John Paul II

Summer vacation is way too short for kids and way too long for many parents. Whatever the feelings, it is time to return to school, schedules and homework. Now might be a good opportunity to review some important topics for conversations with your children. No matter what their age or grade level, it is a good practice for parents to have conversations with their kids about their family values, safety and "what to do if" situations. The things that matter to you and your family should be reviewed and emphasized in as many ways as possible with your children. However, finding creative ways to accomplish this is the challenge.

Over the course of the past 27 years, I have trained hundreds of parents in various education programs and the feedback from a very large majority of them is consistent: they intend to speak with their kids, they want to, but they just do not know how. What often results are good intentions that are not acted upon.

Excuses, excuses, excuses! There are many-but are they really good ones? Embarrassment is one of the big ones. For the most part, today's parents were not on the receiving end of these important conversations with their own parents, and are often uncomfortable with starting conversations that are difficult.

Being confident about what you want to say, how you want to say it and when, helps to quell the anxiety that accompanies this responsibility. Below are some helpful suggestions for topics, opportunities and some all around general advice to assist you in this important responsibility of parenthood.

Talking with your children before something happens gives them the tools, language and confidence to make good, safe and informed decisions, and may help to protect their lives. May your conversations be fruitful and blessed!

Topics:

- What are the safety rules in your family?
- What is the plan should there be an emergency in your family?
- Who are the safe adults in their lives?
- What should a child do when another adult asks the child to keep a secret?
- What are your family and Faith values regarding respecting life?
- What is the appropriate language to name body parts?
- What values about God's gift of Life do you espouse as a family?
- What are your expectations of your children?
- What are appropriate physical, emotional and behavioral boundaries?
- What do you do when a stranger or another adult makes them uncomfortable?

Opportunities:

- Try having car conversations with your children. They can be brief, private and you do not have to look at each other!
- Plan family pizza nights with a movie that helps to illustrate your family values. Discuss your insights after the movie. Listen to theirs.
- Find teachable moments: issues in school, on the news or in the neighborhood are opportunities for you to begin conversations with your children.
- Ask your kids who their friends are and about their families. Make sure you know them.
- Offering to pick up/drop off your kids affords you loads of opportunities to start conversations.
- Insert yourself into the lives of your children-their interpersonal relationships, school and friends. Do not be afraid to make yourself known.
- Be a leader; do not wait for your kids to ask questions. You should initiate questions.
- Take trips to museums, aquariums, zoos and places that express the fullness of life. Use these teachable moments to teach about the gift of life and creation.

#### General Advice:

- Be brief. Do not feel that these conversations have to be long and drawn out.
- Speak often. Kids remember through repetition. Short catch phrases, shared family clues and references make it interesting and important. It creates ownership.
- Do not be shy. Teach your children pride and respect for who they are and how beautifully God created them.
- Be confident. Research your material and use appropriate books, videos and media resources to explain your points.
- Be clear. Do not use confusing words. Explain everything. Teach by patient example.
- Be loving. Always show love, compassion, respect and kindness. Never laugh at them, but laugh with them.
- Teach appropriate and acceptable words and phrases. This avoids shame and guilty feelings.
- Remind your children that God loves them tremendously and so do you.
- Let them know that they can tell you anything, and you will be there for them to help them through it.
- Teach them that nothing is impossible for God whose love permeates your family and makes you strong.

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