

Conversation Starters

There are many ways to strike up a conversation.

- **Ask a variety of questions.** One excellent tip is to have a variety of ways to initiate a conversation. If you always ask the kids, *How was your day?* it is pretty easy to answer with a one word answer like, *Fine* or *Okay*. Try a different question like:
 - *How did the math test go?*
 - *Did you start any new units today?*
 - *What did you do in gym class?*

Here are some other questions you can ask, specifically to learn about their class and classmates at school:

- *Who's the class clown?*
- *Who puts up their hand the most often to answer questions?*
- *Who is the best worker?*
- *Did you have any class discussions in any of your subjects today?*
- *What was it about and what was your opinion in the discussion?*
- *Name one thing you learned today that you didn't know yesterday.*
- **Indirectly bring up a topic.** A very effective way to begin a conversation is by referring to an outside source. Casually bring up topics like:
 - *My friend at work was telling me about her daughter...*
 - *I read an article in the newspaper...*
 - *I heard about...*
 - *I saw...*

★ *"I have found the 'indirect' approach to addressing certain topics with my kids seems to really work. For instance, if I want to discuss chores—to say that we aren't happy with the way the kids are doing chores in our house will get a negative reaction right from the start. But if I begin the conversation by saying, 'I was talking with my friend today and their family has a neat way of sharing the work at home.' Talking about someone else seems to take the edge off. The kids don't feel threatened in any way and everyone is more likely to listen and give their input or reaction."* ★



- **Use role playing and discussions.** Discussion or role-playing is effective, especially when you are dealing with character development. For example:

Fairness – What would you do if someone doesn't let you play at recess?

– What words would you use or should you just ignore them? Let's try that right now.

Honesty – What would you do if your friend wants to borrow your answers for a Math assignment? They are clearly cheating, but are you cheating too by giving it to them?

– How would you handle it?



- **Conversation starters.** Write up some questions on small pieces of paper. Place them in an envelope that can be kept handy in the kitchen. Pull one out to place in the centre of the kitchen table occasionally at meal time. Make the topics interesting:

– What is your favourite TV show and why?

– Which cartoon character are you most like? Least like?

– Which character do you like the least and why?

– Who is your favourite teacher and why? What about your least favourite?

– Who is your best friend? What traits does a best friend have?

– Who is your mentor?

Or use some more serious topics.

– What if your friend lied to you and you found out?

– What would you do if someone offered you drugs?

- **Newspaper clippings.** Cut out an important article from the paper and read it out loud for everyone to discuss.
- **Parents sharing their own stories.** Sharing stories about your experiences as a child will help give your kids ideas on how to deal with difficult issues.



★ *“Our family was chatting in the living room one night and we started telling stories about embarrassing moments we'd each had. As we told the stories, we were able to laugh about situations that were once quite upsetting and embarrassing. My husband told us how embarrassed he was years ago when he asked a girl out for a date and she said 'No'. He described how 'crushed' he was and how he really didn't know what to say back to her. It was a great opportunity for a discussion about how that might feel. It was definitely 'food for thought' for my two kids in their early teens, since they could soon be facing similar situations. This conversation had us considering how to say 'no' in a kind way, as well as thinking about how to handle a rejection.”* ★