



Conversation starters for children and families

Fostering lifelong connections

Engaging with children

Engaging children and young people in conversation can be hard work at the best of times. Many parents, carers and adults from extended family networks will have asked, 'how was your day today?', only to get one-word responses such as 'good' or 'fine'.

Social distancing measures because of the COVID-19 pandemic mean that many families are having to find alternative ways to keep children connected to family members who don't live with them – using phone calls, video calls, and text messages.

Here are some conversation starters to help adults sustain healthy and meaningful relationships with children when they are physically distant from them.

Support them to lead the conversation

- Pick **one** or **two** conversation starters to talk about during your next conversation. Allow time for children to respond and let the conversation go where it naturally leads to.
- Don't fire off lots of questions in quick succession or it might feel like an interrogation.
- Emphasise that there are no wrong answers.
- Show you are listening and interested in their answers – you can follow up by asking 'hey, tell me more about...'
- Give them some time to think. Try not to jump in and cut children off or put words in their mouth. Let them finish what they are saying, even if they are having trouble finding the words or are saying something that sounds a bit ridiculous.



Conversation Tips

Ask about their day

Instead of asking a general question like 'how was your day?' try more specific questions such as:

- What was your favourite part of the day?
- What was your least favourite part of the day?
- Tell me about something that made you laugh or smile today.
- Was there something new you learned or tried today? If there was, can you tell me more about that.
- Was there a time when you were bored today? If there was, what other things would you have liked to do instead?

Get to know them better

Encourage them to tell you about their likes and dislikes:

- What is something that you are good at or like to do?
- What is something that you would like to do better?
- Tell me about a time when you felt proud.
- Tell me about a time when you felt embarrassed.
- What would a perfect day look like for you?

Conversation Tips

Find out about their interests

Ask them about their likes and what they enjoy doing, for example:

- What would you like to do next time we see each other in person and why?
- If you could only eat one fruit forever, what would it be and what do you like about it?
- If you could go anywhere in the world for a holiday, where would you go and what would like to do there?
- What is your favorite book, if you could only read or listen to one book, which one would it be and why is it special to you?
- If you could only had one game or toy to play with, which one would you pick and why do you like it so much?

Ask about their hopes for the future

- If you could have any job in the world, what would it be and why?
- What is one thing you want to achieve before you finish primary/high school?
- If you could achieve any goal in life, however impossible it may seem, what would it be and why?
- What kind of place would you like to live in some day? (prompts: city, near the beach, on a farm, in a travelling caravan, somewhere else?)
- If you could change anything about the world, what would you change and how?

Getting to know about their friendships

Friendships are very important to children and young people, so they may find it easier to talk about their friends. You can find out about their friends by asking them:

- Who is your best friend and why do you like them?
- Tell me about something kind you've done for your best friend?
- Is there something kind your best friend has done for you?
- What is your favorite thing to do with your friend?
- Who is the nicest person you know, and why do you think they are nice?

Tap into their imagination

One way of learning more about childrens hopes and dreams is to explore their imagination with them. Try to share their excitement through finding out if:

- They could have any superpower, what would it be and why?
- They could build or create anything in the world, what would it be and why?
- Their pets (or the animals around you) could talk, what do they think they would say?
- They wrote a book, what would it be about. Who would be the main character / hero?
- They went to another planet, what would they take with them?



Useful links

<https://www.positiveparentingconnection.net/40-questions-that-get-kids-talking/>

<https://www.verywellfamily.com/conversation-starters-for-kids-4160004>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pride-and-joy/201402/how-have-better-conversations-your-children>

For more information

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