

## OCTOBER 2009

### Talk Matters Issue



## Finding Face Time

We live in a complex world that challenges parents and children with a range of difficult issues. When you factor in texting and social utility sites like Facebook and MySpace (not to mention videogames) and “face time” between you and your child get pretty narrow. Kids were probably rolling their eyes at the concept of talking to their parents when we lived in mud huts, but developing good parent-to-child communication is critical to growing well-adjusted adults.

## Why is Communicating So Hard?

If patterns of open and honest communication were not developed at an early age — and who among us did that as well as we had expected to — then our children have good reason to not be enthusiastic about talking to us. For starters:

- They think they know what parents will say, so they don't listen
- Kids and adolescents have short attentions spans
- They feel parents don't

understand their views and feelings

- They think talking is just another word for nagging
- They associate their parents with constantly being told what to do
- They believe parents harp on things they don't want to hear
- They expect to be bored

## Straight Talk on Listening

Children, especially young children, can sometimes try our patience because they often take forever getting out what they want to say, and they often repeat themselves. Remember that this is part of their process. Also, teach your children to indicate by their actions that they are listening because they are often listening even if they don't seem as if they are. Set a good example by being a good listener:

- When your child is talking about things that are important to them, stop and listen
- Make eye contact when you are talking to them
- Listen to their point of view, even if it's difficult to hear
- Let them complete their point before you respond

- Repeat back to them what you heard them say
- Resist arguing about who is right. Instead say, “I know you disagree with me, but this is what I think.”
- Stay mindful of your tone and facial expression
- Wait until a teenager demonstrates a readiness to talk
- Remember that young children can handle small bits of information at a time
- Read to young children and

## Communicate Your Values

As a parent, you have an opportunity to be the first person in your child's life to talk with him or her about tough issues like drugs and violence before anyone else can confuse them. Start early and use techniques that are non-judgmental.



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then ask questions as a tool for developing skills

- Learn about your children's interests

### Time for Dinner

Only one third of U.S. families eat dinner together most nights. The slow-paced, time-honored family dinner of past generations is slipping away and being replaced with something akin to a frenzied pit stop. Still, sitting down at the table remains one of the best ways for families to talk with one another and to stay connected. Regular family meals provide children with a sense of stability in a world that is

often confusing. Here are some tips to help you get the most out of your family dinner:

- Put cell phones away and turn off the TV and radio
- Start talking during meal preparation as a way of easing into family discussions
- Start with what's possible. Don't feel guilty if dinners are not a daily event
- Avoid criticism and judgment
- Specific questions are more likely to trigger conversation
- Make room for laughter
- Family dinners can also be weekday or weekend breakfasts or lunches

## Helpful Resources

- [www.talkingwithkids.org](http://www.talkingwithkids.org)
- [family.samhsa.gov/talk](http://family.samhsa.gov/talk)
- [life.familyeducation.com](http://life.familyeducation.com)
- [www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org)

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### Make Use of Everyday Situations

- Driving in the car
- Evening snack times
- Shopping
- Bed time
- Breakfast
- Waiting for appointments

