

## Talking to Your Parents - or Other Adults

You probably talk to friends way more than you talk to your parents. That's natural as you get older. Even if you and your parents have a great relationship, you want to find your own path and make your own choices.

It still can feel good to talk with your parents, though. You probably want their help, advice, support, or just their company at times. But talking to parents can seem difficult or intimidating — especially when it comes to certain subjects. Here are some tips to make it easier.

### **Talk About Everyday Stuff – and Do It Every Day**

The more you do something, the easier it gets. Talking to parents about everyday stuff builds a bond that can smooth the way for times you need to approach them with a topic that's more difficult.

**Find something trivial to chat about each day.** Talk about how your team did at the track meet. Share something one of your teachers said. Even small talk about what's for dinner can keep your relationship strong and comfortable.

**It's never too late to start.** If you feel your relationship with your parents is strained, try easing into conversations by mentioning that cute thing the dog or your little brother did. Talking to parents every day not only keeps an existing relationship strong, it also can help a frayed relationship get stronger.

When your parents feel connected to your daily life, they can be there for you when something really important comes up.

### **Raising Difficult Topics**

Maybe you need to break bad news to a parent, like getting a speeding ticket or failing an exam. Perhaps you're feeling scared or stressed about something. Or maybe you just really, really want to tell your parents about your new boyfriend or girlfriend, but you don't know how they'll react, how it will feel to tell them, or how to find the words.

Here are 3 steps to help you prepare for that talk.

#### **Step 1: Know What You Want From the Conversation**

It takes maturity to figure out what you want to get out of a conversation. (Most adults aren't so good at this!)

What you hope to achieve can vary, but most often you'll probably want your parent to do one (or more) of these things:

- simply listen and understand what you're going through without offering advice or commentary
- offer you advice or help
- give permission or support for something
- guide you back on track if you're in trouble — in a way that's fair and without harsh criticism or put-downs

Why think about this before you begin talking? **So you can tell mom or dad why you want to talk in a way that communicates what you need.** For example:

- "Mom, I need to tell you about a problem I'm having, but I need you to just listen, OK? Don't give me advice — I just want you to know what's bothering me."
- "Dad, I need to get your permission to go on a class trip next week. Can I tell you about it?"
- "Mom, I need your advice about something. Can we talk?"

### **Step 2: Identify Your Feelings**

Lots of people hesitate to bring up sensitive topics because talking about them can be so uncomfortable. Things like personal feelings or sex are awkward to discuss with anyone, let alone a parent.

It's natural to feel nervous before an important conversation. Recognize how you're feeling — for example, maybe you're worried that telling parents about a problem will make them disappointed or upset. **But instead of letting those feelings stop you from talking, put them into words as part of the conversation.** For example:

- "Mom, I need to talk to you — but I'm afraid I'll disappoint you."
- "Dad, I need to talk to you about something — but it's kind of embarrassing."

If you think a parent may be unsupportive, harsh, or critical, it can help to defuse things by beginning with a statement like, "Mom, I have something to tell you. I'm not proud of what I've done, and you might be mad. But I know I need to tell you. Can you hear me out?"

### **Step 3: Pick a Good Time to Talk**

Approach your parent when he or she isn't busy with something else. Ask, "Can we talk? Is now a good time?" Driving in the car or going for a walk can be great opportunities to talk. If it's hard to find a good time, say, "I need to talk to you. When is a good time?"

Difficult conversations benefit from good planning. **Think ahead about what you want to say or ask. Write down the most important ideas if you need to.**

### **How to Talk so Parents Will Listen**

As most of us know, talking and listening doesn't go smoothly every time. Emotions and past experiences can get in the way. Will parents take you seriously, believe what you say, listen to and respect your opinions, and hear you out without interrupting? A lot depends on your parent. Some parents are easy to talk to, some are great listeners, and some are harder to approach.

But some of what happens depends on you, too. Since communication is a two-way street, the way you talk can influence how well a parent listens and understands you.

So here are some guidelines to consider when talking to parents:

- **Be clear and direct.** Be as clear as you can about what you think, feel, and want. Give details that can help parents understand your situation. They can listen better or be more helpful if they understand what you mean and what's really going on.
- **Be honest.** If you're always honest, a parent will be likely to believe what you say. If you sometimes hide the truth or add too much drama to the truth, parents will have a harder time believing what you tell them. If you lie, they'll find it hard to trust you.
- **Try to understand their point of view.** If you have a disagreement, can you see your parents' side? If you can, say so. Telling parents you understand their views and feelings helps them be willing to see yours, too.

- **Try not to argue or whine.** Using a tone that's friendly and respectful makes it more likely parents will listen and take what you say seriously. It also makes it more likely that they'll talk to you in the same way. Of course, this is hard for any of us (adults included) when we're feeling heated about something. If you think your emotions might get the better of you, do something to blow off steam before talking: Go for a run. Cry. Hit your pillow. Do whatever it takes to sound calm when you need to.

### **What If Talking to Parents Doesn't Work?**

Your parents won't always see things your way and they won't always say yes to what you ask. They might listen respectfully, understand your point of view, and do everything you need *except* say yes. It can be hard to take no for an answer. But gracefully accepting a no can help you get more yeses in the future.

But what if it's more than just saying no to something? What if you really need your parents to be there for you but they can't? Some parents have troubles of their own. Others just can't be available in the ways their kids need and deserve. Others have a hard time being flexible.

If you can't talk to your parent, seek out other adults you can trust. Find a relative, a teacher, or a counselor who will listen, understand, encourage, believe in you, and care. Then follow all the tips in this article to get the most from your conversation with that person.

Acting respectfully demonstrates maturity. Parents are more likely to think of their children as grown up (and, as a result, capable of making more important decisions) when they see them acting maturely. Give these tips a try and you'll come across that way — maybe even more mature than your parents!

Reviewed by: D'Arcy Lyness, PhD

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