



HOPE Newsletter - Issue 65

"175 Conversation Starters for Family Discussions"

Parents often tell me they don't know where to begin to have a "real" conversation with their child. These questions will get you started. Rather than badgering your child with them, use one as the jumping off point for a two-way conversation. Start by asking your child the question, and listen to the answer, remembering to reflect back what she's saying so she knows you understand.

Don't shy away from expressing your opinions; kids are often curious what parents think. Just be sure that you listen first, and that you listen more than you talk.

And resist the urge to lecture, which will make your child tune you out. The point is developing the habit of conversational back and forth that deepens your relationship.

These questions also work well to launch family dinner table conversations.

Getting to Know Your Child

- What are the three most interesting things about you?
- Name five reasons you're glad to be alive.
- If you could have any super power, what would it be and why?
- If you had a time machine for a day, what would you do with it?
- What's your favorite song? Why?
- What do you want to be when you grow up? Why?
- What's your favorite movie? Why?
- Why do you think kids put rings in their eyebrows and noses and bellybuttons?
- How about tattoos?
- Do you think you would ever want to do that? Why or why not?
- If we could go anywhere you wanted on vacation, where would you choose? Why?
- If you could have a conversation with anyone in history, who would it be?
- What would you want to ask them?

- What is your earliest memory?
- What are you most proud of?
- If you could change one thing about your appearance, what would it be?
- If you had to choose only three words to describe yourself, what would you say?
- Is there anything about you that inspires other people in any way?
- What is your idea of an ideal day?
- Would you rather live in a castle, on a boat, or on a cloud?
- If you were invisible where would you go and what would you do?
- What is a quality you wish you could have more of?
- If you could ask anyone for help, who would it be and why?
- What scares you the most and why?
- What makes you feel better?
- What do you worry about the most?
- What is your biggest goal this year?
- When do you feel the most proud of who you are?

Your Relationship with Your Child

- What is your favorite thing about our relationship?
- What is your least favorite thing about our relationship?
- Do you think you can tell me anything? What would you be most likely to want to lie to me about? Why?
- If you got into really big trouble, how do you think I would respond?
- Is there something I can do better that I am not doing now?
- Do you feel like you could talk with me about anything at all?
- If we had a special day together what would you want to do?
- Do I ever embarrass you?
- What are the most important things I have taught you?
- If you had to choose only three words to describe me, what would you say?
- If you and your parents switched places for a day, what are the first things you would do?

Family

- How do you think your friends' families compare to ours? Are they about as close? Closer? More distant? Why do you think that?
- Do you think your friends talk to their parents?
- What do you think makes a family close?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how strict are the parents in this family? What is the ideal number?
- Is the discipline in our family fair?
- What's the best thing about our family?
- If you could change one thing about your parents, what would it be?
- What are the most important things your parents have taught you?
- What do you think are the most important qualities of a good parent?
- What do you think makes a happy family?

- Tell each person in the family why you're glad they're part of the family.
- How do you think our family is the same or different from other families?
- Do you want to have kids when you grow up? Why or why not?
- What kind of parent will you be?
- Do you think you will be close to your siblings when you grow up?
- How many of your ancestors can you name and what do you know about them?
- What is your favorite family tradition?
- What three words do you think best describe our family?

Blended Families

- Do blended families take more work? Can they be as happy as birth families?
- Do you ever miss your dad?
- Do you think things would be different if your dad was still with us and I had never met your step-dad? How?
- Even though your step-dad is not your biological dad, you know he adores you. Do you feel close to him?
- You know, to your little sister you are completely her sister, not her stepsister. Do you feel that way, or is it different for you? Do you feel close to her?
- When you both grow up, do you think you will stay connected?
- Do you think it's harder for children who have been adopted than for children who weren't?
- Do you think it's a good idea for kids who were adopted to look up their birth parents? Why or why not?

Values & Character

- What traits do you most admire in other people?
- Did you help anyone today?
- Did you have a chance to be kind to anyone today?
- Is it hard to make the choice to be kind sometimes?
- Was anyone kind to you today?
- Do you think it's okay to lie about your age to get into an Amusement Park with a cheaper ticket? Is it ever ok to lie?
- Do you think your parents ever lie?
- What kinds of lies do your friends tell their parents?
- Does it matter if a person makes a moral or immoral choice, if no one ever knows?
- Is it ever ok to cheat, in academics, sports, business?
- If someone you loved was very sick but could not afford the medicine to get better, would it be okay to steal the medicine?
- Do adults automatically deserve respect? How do you earn respect?
- What could our family do that would make the world a better place?
- What do you think the biggest problem in the world is? How about in our country?

- How important is money? Do you think there is enough money in the world for everyone to have enough?
- How would you change the world if you could?
- What do you think the "take-away" message of this movie is?
- Do you admire the hero in this movie? Why or why not?
- Do you swear? How many of the kids at school swear? What do you think about swearing?

School & Learning

- Who is or was your favorite teacher? Why?
- Do you think there is a difference between being smart and being wise?
- What are the best and worst things about school?
- What do you know how to do that you could teach someone else?
- How common do you think cheating is at your school?
- What would you do if all the other kids were planning to cheat on the final and you knew that doing so would lower your grade?
- Do you respect your teachers? Why or why not? Do you think they respect you?
- What do you think makes the most difference in how kids do at school? Hard work, innate ability, parental supervision, peer attitudes, how good the school is?
- Do you think it makes sense to admit students to a college based only on academic achievement or should an attempt be made to achieve racial and ethnic diversity as well?
- Do you think kids from wealthier school districts have an unfair advantage?
- What do you think about home-schooling?

Emotions

- Do you know what EQ (emotional intelligence quotient) is? If someone has a high EQ, what are they like?
- Are you able to tell me or others when you are upset?
- How do you feel when someone is angry with you? How do you act?
- Are you a "cup is half full" or "cup is half empty" kind of person?
- What do you do to cheer yourself up when you feel down?
- Have I never noticed when you're sad?
- What is the best way for me to help you when you feel grumpy?
- When do you like me to hug you? When does it embarrass you?
- What hurts your feelings? How do you act when your feelings are hurt?
- When you get really angry, how do you help yourself calm down?
- When you make a mistake, are you able to repair things so that you end up feeling ok?
- What are the different kinds of courage? How do you define bravery?

Drug and Alcohol Use

- Why do you think it's illegal for kids under the age of 21 to drink alcohol? After all, many parents do it.
- Why are marijuana and other drugs illegal?
- What would you do if you were in a car and the driver had been drinking or smoking marijuana?
- What if the driver was a grown-up, like your friend's parent?
- What do you think happens in the brain when people smoke marijuana? Why shouldn't kids smoke it?
- Have you ever thought that I drank too much? Acted differently when I drank alcohol?
- When do you think kids are ready to try alcohol?
- Do you know any kids or adults who you think have alcohol or drug problems?
- When do you think kids are ready to try alcohol?
- Do you know any kids who have tried alcohol or drugs, what do you think of them?
- What do the kids at your school do at parties?
- Have you been to a party like that? Have you ever been offered a drink? A marijuana cigarette or other drugs?
- How did you handle it?
- What would you do if you were at a party and someone passed out from drinking alcohol?
- Would you be worried about becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs?
- Do you think coffee is a drug? When do you think it's ok for kids to start drinking coffee?

Friendship & Peers

- Who is your best friend and why?
- What traits do you look for in friends?
- Do you think you're good at making friends?
- Where do you consider yourself on the shy to outgoing continuum?
- Have you ever been mad at one of your friends? How did you handle it?
- Do you think there is a such thing as peer pressure? Do you ever feel peer pressure? Do you think some people are more susceptible to peer pressure than others? Why do you think that is?
- What do you think makes a person popular? Are wealthier kids more popular? Kids who mature faster?
- Are you popular? Why or why not? Would you like to be?
- What do you think leadership is? What makes a good leader?

Bullying

- Who gets teased at school or in your activities, and why?
- Does the teasing ever go overboard?
- How can we define what's ok and what's overboard?
- Does the kid getting teased think the teasing is bullying, or not?

- Who leads the teasing?
- Do the kids who aren't leading the teasing feel they have to join in?
- How do the kids who get teased react?
- Do they stick up for themselves?
- Does that help or make matters worse?
- Does anyone else ever step in to stick up for the kids being teased? (My son once defined a friend as someone who didn't join in the teasing, even if they did nothing to stop it!)
- What do you think the teasing does to the person being teased?
- How does it affect the people doing the teasing?
- If it is the choices we make that express who we are, what does teasing someone say about us?
- Do you ever get teased or bullied?
- If you did, what could you do or say?

Love, Sex & Marriage

- At what age do you think people can fall in love? At what age should people marry?
- Do you think people should be married to have sex? If not, how should they decide whether they're ready?
- What do you think changes when you have sex?
- How do you think love is different in real life than it is in the movies?
- What would be most important to you in looking for a spouse?
- Do you think any of the kids at school are not virgins? What do you think about that?
- Do kids at your school actually "date"? What do you think about the idea of "friends with benefits"? Does the girl benefit as much as the guy?
- Do you think girls and guys have the same needs from sex and relationships?
- Do you know anyone who's gay? Does anyone treat them differently? What do you think about that?
- Why do you think people get divorced? How do you think it affects the kids?

Body Image and Gender Roles

- How do you think ordinary peoples' bodies compare to the models and actors on TV? How does it make you feel to watch them?
- What do you think of the way girls and guys in high school dress these days?
- Do you think girls look better with or without makeup?
- Is there a difference between "attractive" and "hot"? Between "hot" and "sexy"?
- Who decides whether someone is pretty or attractive?
- Is attractiveness innate or is it something we can make ourselves?
- Does making ourselves attractive have a cost? (for instance, comfort, or adventure, or fun.) Is that different for girls than for boys?
- Is someone pretty who acts ugly?
- Is someone pretty who is in rags but acts bravely and with caring?

- What matters most, attractiveness or being strong, smart, brave, responsible, caring, etc?
- How would you define “sexy”? Is it important to be “sexy”? Are some of the kids at school sexy? How does someone know if they’re sexy? Is it important that your future boyfriend or girlfriend be sexy?
- What are the most important qualities you would want in a boyfriend or girlfriend?
- Do you think most girls are glad when they reach puberty? Why or why not? Do you think most guys are glad when they reach puberty? Why or why not?
- What's the hardest thing about being a girl?
- What's the hardest thing about being a boy?
- Do you know anyone with an eating disorder? Why do you think kids develop eating disorders? Why do you think there’s such an emphasis on thin-ness in our society?
- Can you name three things that you really like about yourself that have nothing to do with what you look like?

Spirituality

- Do you believe in God? Why or why not? If so, how do you picture God?
- Do you ever talk to God?
- Is spirituality the same as religion or different?
- Has religion played a positive or negative role in history?
- Do you have good friends who practice religions that are different from ours? Acquaintances? How are you like them? How are you different?
- Do you think there is one best religion? Why or why not?
- What do you think happens after death?
- What do you think is the meaning of life? Why are we alive?
- How will you know if you’ve had a successful life?

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