



Parenting Tips for Teaching Older Kids Conversation Skills

While it is impossible to know all of the reasons, there is no doubt that learning to listen and talk is extremely important to broadening knowledge, enhancing understanding and building community. The English Language Arts Florida Standards include an emphasis on developing speaking and listening, the basic tools for conversation. Follow the tips below to help your kids learn good conversational skills.

1. Model a Good Conversation

Make a point of having one-to-two minute interactions, one-on-one, at least a few times each day with your child. Share information about yourself as you might when meeting a friend or acquaintance, and show interest in what your child wants to talk about by asking questions about his or her interests. Conversation enhancers include responses and prompts like:

- “Really?”
- “Wow!”
- “That’s interesting.”
- “No kidding!”

If your child doesn’t or won’t share easily at first, don’t give up.

2. Encourage Physical Cues

Talk about ways to develop nonverbal behaviors, too, when communicating. For example, you might teach a strategy like S.L.A.N.T. (Sit up straight. Listen. Answer and ask questions. Nod to show interest. Track the speaker.)

3. Challenge Put-Downs or Hurtful Comments

For example, if your child says, “I think what she did was really stupid,” challenge with, “How else can you say that without being hurtful?” If your child seems unaware, model ways to explore alternatives with questions along the following lines:

- “What happened to make you feel that way?”
- “How would you have handled things differently?”
- “Do you think there is only right answer, or could there be more?”

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

These are questions without one correct response that stimulate discussion and can be a very powerful way to reinforce the idea that there are different views of an issue, or a set of beliefs that can be equally valid. For example: “So if Columbus came knocking on your door and told you that sailing to the New World would be an amazing adventure and there might be lots of riches there, but you might never arrive because the world was flat, would you go?”

5. Put Thinking Ahead of Knowing

When you ask your child a question, don’t accept, “I don’t know.” Tell your child that you don’t require him or her to “know” but that you do expect him or her to “think.” Teach your child how to wonder aloud, speculate, guess or give the best answer possible starting with a disclaimer such as, “I’m not sure about that, but I think _____.”

6. Have Informal Chats

Ask your child what he or she thinks about a current event, maybe the outcome of a game. Share your thoughts as well. For example, “I thought their team lost the game because they made a number of mistakes, not because our team is better. What do you think?”

7. Make Eye Contact

When your child is speaking and you are listening, maintain eye contact. Ask your child to do the same.

Parent Challenge: Try these tips to engage your child in rich conversation during your next family dinner!