

Parent and family communication

Children in mid to late primary school can be difficult to communicate with. An increasing desire for independence and complex feelings and emotions can make it hard for young people to feel comfortable expressing themselves.

Talking with and listening to your children

When your child talks to you about day-to-day things, where possible, stop what you are doing and listen. Be supportive and encourage them to talk. You don't have to know everything about their life. However, you do need to try to keep in touch with what is happening on a day-to-day basis. Try to make it clear that your child can talk with you no matter what the topic.

“My mum and dad have always been there for me and I thank them for that” – Student

Think about

- Are there times each day when you are able to share some time with your child?
- Do you try to let your child know that you are really interested in what they have to say?

Tips for opening up communication with your child

- Show your child you enjoy talking with them.
- Let your child know that you want to know what is going on in their lives, it is not just when they are in trouble or having problems.
- Arrange opportunities to share time with your child when you can talk while doing an activity together; cooking, craft, going to the football with you.
- Ask your child their opinion on events, issues and general daily proceedings, so they feel their opinion is valued.
- Praise your child. Not just when they have had successes but also when they have had a go, even if they make mistakes. Help them to feel valued.
- Encourage and role model positive language. For example:

“I really like the way you asked your brother if you could play his game”

“It is great to see you treating your friends in such a caring way”

Important – If you talk with your child about daily topics, there will be greater chance they will talk about more difficult issues such as school issues, social problems or bullying.

Open-ended questions

A good way to encourage your child to talk with you is to use open-ended questions. These questions encourage your child to talk because they ask for more than just a “yes” or “no” answer.

An example of an open question might be “What did you do on the weekend?” This is a question that allows for an interesting answer: I had a sleepover at my friend’s house and we went to the movies and rode our bikes.

“My brother always checks up on me and says nice things and takes me places” – Student

A closed question in the same situation, such as “Did you have a nice weekend?” only allows for a brief answer: “Yes”.

Closed-ended question

- Did you have a good day?
- How was school?
- You look sad. Are you alright?
- Did you play today?

Open-ended question

- What happened today?
- What did you do at school today?
- How are you feeling? You look sad.
- Who did you play with today?
- What did you play?

Keep listening

As your child moves closer to adolescence they may not want to communicate as much with their parents as before. This does not mean they don’t want to communicate to their parents at all, nor does it mean they have nothing to say. It is important at this time for parents not to give up and keep asking questions and talking on a regular basis. This helps children to feel supported during these changing times. Children who feel their parents are always there when they need them usually feel close to and like being a member of the family. This feeling of closeness between family members will help to protect your child from many problems, including bullying.