

CONVERSATION STARTERS TO USE WITH YOUR KIDS

The best way to start a conversation is to ask an open-ended question. An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with yes, no or any other one word answer. Here are some examples:

Did you have a good day at school?

Not a good question. It can be answered with yes or no.

What happened at school today?

Better, but still not great. You might hear “nothing” as an answer.

What was the best thing that happened at school today?

This is a good question, because even a one word answer can lead you to another question. They might say ‘Recess’ or ‘Lunch’ or ‘Band’ and you can respond with, ‘So what made it the best?’

The best conversations trade information about ideas and feelings, and about deeply held convictions. Good questions lead from simple answers to ideas, to feelings, and to beliefs. Follow this conversation and see if you can see the train moving from simple to complex.

Mom: “Hi, Josh! Welcome home. How was school?”

Josh: “Fine.”

Mom: “What was the best thing that happened today?”

Josh: “I dunno. Maybe watching these two kids beat on each other during lunch.”

Mom: “What happened? Why were they beating on each other?”

Josh: “Well, I don’t really know, but Logan said the one guy started saying things about the other guy’s girlfriend on the bus and they started fighting there but the bus driver had to break them up. Then I guess they finished it at school.”

Mom: “How do feel about having watched all that?”

Josh: “I dunno. Okay I guess.”

Mom: “What would you have done if it had been Logan being beat on?”

Josh: "He doesn't have a girlfriend."

Mom: "I know he doesn't now, but he will one day. What if he was being beaten on for something else? Maybe for hanging around with you?" Mom winks at him and smiles.

Josh: "I hate it when there's fighting at school. I'd just tell Logan to forget it and avoid those guys. That group of guys is terrible. They pick on everyone for no reason." Josh's voice begins to rise and he begins to get more animated and angry even as he is speaking. "But you know what really gets me? Those teachers know exactly what is going on and they do nothing about it! Those guys can get away with murder because the teachers are too chicken to take care of business and too busy drinking their coffee in the staff room! They don't care about us! They only care about their paychecks!"

Now mom has a glimpse into the stress of Josh's school day, his attitude toward his teachers, his fear of the school bullies, and his default position of avoiding conflict at any cost. If she had just let him off the hook after her first (not-so-great) question and his answer of 'Fine' she would have missed all that.

Conversations like this – good conversations that move from facts to feelings to beliefs – don't happen overnight. They take practice to ask, and they take practice to answer. So don't be frustrated if you have some stops and starts... just keep on asking good questions!

WHAT HAPPENS IF I DON'T LIKE THE ANSWER I GET?

It is very possible that your child will try to avoid answering your good questions with good answers at the beginning. Be gentle but persistent. Ask again tonight, and tomorrow, and every day after that. Eventually the dam will break and you will hear good answers.

However, getting good answers doesn't guarantee you will always *like* those answers!

You might hear what *really* goes on at school, or what your kids' friends are *really* into during their spares, or what *really* happened at the party on the weekend. You might hear things that make your hair stand up on end. You might even want to put your fingers in your ears, close your eyes and scream!

But you can't! This is your child. And just like you reached out to build your relationship with good questions, your child is reaching out to see if you will still love him or her if you really knew what was going on.

Pray before you ask the question, and absolutely pray before you respond. If your daughter tells you something you don't want to hear and you respond with 'What?!?!' chances are she won't want to tell you anything else.

Just keep asking questions, keep your face calm, and keep your tone gentle and the shock and surprise deeply hidden in your heart. You can go for a walk or drive later and let out all the steam! Now is the time to have that 'good' conversation.

SO HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Getting started is easy. Just ask a good question!

Set aside time – meal time, drive time, bed time, or anytime – to ask good questions. It's not ideal to ask a really good question when you've only got about 2 minutes before you'll be interrupted. If you expect to hear a good answer, allow the time for your child to warm up to that and get the words out. You might also need time to respond. Setting aside time is important. It can be on the go, but it can't happen if you don't plan it.

Allow for privacy. If you are asking good questions, especially for the first few times, ask them when you are alone with a child. That way if something 'comes up', or they are nervous about talking to you so openly, they won't have to do it in front of others. If the question is somewhat personal ("Of all the girls in your class, who has characteristics that you'd like to see in a wife?" or "What is it about your boyfriend that you really love/hate?") asking in private will communicate respect to them.

Allow for fun and laughter. The best way to do this is to ask questions that will bring comical responses. This helps them to trust that you are not targeting them with every question! If you sometimes ask about school; sometimes ask about dream vacations, or what they would name a cross between a gold fish and a kangaroo; and sometimes ask about their deepest fears; they will understand that you want to get to know *all* of who they are, and not just address your favorite topics (or the 'juicy' ones).

Include others. Ask the same question of everyone in the room. This targets no one person and can kick-start great conversation amongst others in the group as well.

Challenge them to ask you good questions. Be prepared to answer them – with good answers! This can open you up to some very vulnerable questions, but embrace that! If you can answer immediately, do it. If not, teach your children how to respectfully handle situations like that by saying, "Wow! I wasn't prepared to answer that question today. I will answer you completely, but I'll need a day or two to think through that. I want to be sure I give you the best answer I can. Let's talk about this again in two days. Don't let me forget! Now ask me a different one that I can answer right now."

Don't worry if you can't think up good questions. If you can come up with some on your own, great! It gets easier the more you do it. To get you started I've written a list of good questions you can ask. Some of them are for younger kids, some for older kids, and some for teens or young adults. Pick and choose from the various categories. You can ask older children and teens questions from the younger sets, too!

May God bless you and grow you and your family as you deepen your relationships with each other by asking good questions.

Carla Anne

GOOD QUESTIONS

For Young Children

1. If you could be anything for a day, what would you be and what would you do?
2. What was the most fun thing you did today? Why?
3. What was the worst thing that happened today? Why?
4. If you could make imaginary soup what would you put in it?
5. If you could take a rocket to the moon what would you do there?
6. If you could take a ship across the ocean what do you think you would see?
7. Who are your most favorite people in the world? Why?
8. What does Mommy (or Daddy) do to show she (he) loves you?
9. Who are your least favorite people in the world? Why?
10. What do you think heaven looks like?
11. If you could invent a new food what would it taste like?
12. If you could invent a new food what would it look like?
13. How do you think they can make vegetables talk in the movies?
14. How do you think Mommy (or Daddy) would feel if she (he) was all alone?
15. How do you feel when you are all alone?
16. What do you think the biggest tree in the world looks like?
17. How high do you think the biggest mountain in the world is? What does that look like?
18. What do you love best about swimming?
19. What do you love best about the beach?
20. What do you love best about running?
21. What do you love best about jumping?
22. What do you love best about singing?

23. What do you love best about laughing?
24. What do you love best about hugging?
25. What do you love best about sneezing?
26. What do you love best about pretending?
27. What do you love best about joking?
28. What do you love best about reading?
29. What do you love best about movies?
30. What do you love best about eating?
31. What do you love best about sleeping?
32. What do you love best about your friend?
33. If you could only eat one food all day long what would you like to eat?
34. What would be the best gift a king or queen could get?
35. What would be the worst gift a king or queen could get?
36. What do you wish you could do all day long? Why?
37. If you were a color, what color would you be?
38. If you could be a number, what number would you be?
39. What kind of house do you think you might have if you lived in the jungle?
40. If you were ten feet tall what would you love about that?
41. If you were ten feet tall what would you hate about that?
42. What is the most important thing to God? Why do you think so?
43. Who is the most important person to God? Why do you think so?
44. What is the weather/season you like best?
45. What would you do if a clown came to the door and asked to come for dinner?
46. What would you do if all the dogs in the world started talking real words?
47. If your pillow could talk, what do you think it would say?
48. If your shoes could talk, what do you think they would say?

49. If you could run as fast as the wind, where would you run to? Why?
50. If you could jump as high as the sky, what is the first thing you would jump over? Why?
Where would you go?

For Older Children

1. If you could be anyone else for a day, who would you be and what would you do?
2. What was the best part of your day today? Why?
3. What was the worst part of your day today? Why?
4. What do you think heaven is like?
5. What do you think God looks like?
6. Why do you think bullies are mean?
7. What is it about magic tricks that make them fun to watch?
8. Why do you think people line up to go on roller coasters that make them scream?
9. What would you rather be – poor and healthy or rich and deathly sick? Why?
10. What would you rather be – very tall and very fat, or 3 feet tall and very slim? Why?
11. If you could name a new planet what would you name it? Why?
12. If you could live in any country in the world where would you live and why?
13. What is it about movies that make people want to watch them? Especially repeatedly?
14. What do you think would make the best plot for a movie?
15. What do you think would make the best plot for a book?
16. What time period in history would you choose to live in if you could choose? Why?
17. Which historical person would you like to meet in person? Why?
18. Which biblical person would you like to meet and what questions would you ask them?
19. Which of your ancestors would you choose to meet if you could only meet one? Why?
20. If you received one million dollars and had to spend it on yourself, what would you spend it on?

21. If you received one million dollars and had to spend it on someone else, who would that be and what would you do with the money?
22. If you received ten dollars and were told to change the world with it, what would you do?
23. If you received 1 dollar a day for the rest of your life, and you had to spend it every day but you couldn't spend it on yourself, what would you spend it on?
24. What do you think would be the best way to feed the homeless (in our city) and give them homes?
25. How do you feel and what are your thoughts when a homeless person on the street asks you for money or food?
26. How do you feel when people are telling crude jokes?
27. How do you feel when you have been treated unfairly?
28. How do you feel and what would you do if you saw someone else being treated unfairly?
29. What do you think is a good reason for a country to go to war?
30. If you had to leave all your possessions behind except the clothes you are wearing and just one other thing – and you'd never get anything else back – what would that one thing be?
31. If you had to leave all your possessions behind except the clothes you are wearing and just one other thing – and you'd never get anything else back – which clothes would you wear?
32. What is it about you that other people would like to hire you for?
33. What is it about you that convinces other people they want to be your friends?
34. What is it about you that strangers would notice about you first?
35. What is it about you that might alert a police officer to think you are dangerous? Safe? Lying? Truthful?
36. What is it about you that will make you a great parent one day?
37. What is it about you that will make you a great husband/wife one day?
38. What is it about your teacher(s) that you like the best?
39. What is it about your teacher(s) that you like the least?
40. What is it about 'morning people' that you like? Dislike?
41. What is it about 'night owls' that you like? Dislike?

42. If you were alone in the house for 2 hours and you knew you were safe, what would you do?
43. If you were stopped by the police, what would your first thought be?
44. How would you handle things if you were in charge of a toddler that was throwing a fit in the grocery store?
45. What would you do if a mentally disabled person spoke to you? What if you can't understand them?
46. What do you think are the three best things to save money for? Why?
47. If you could choose one restaurant to eat at for the rest of your life, which would it be?
48. What would you do differently if you ran our home?
49. If you could drive any vehicle (car, van, motorcycle, rocket, airplane, monster truck, horse & buggy, etc) what would you choose and where would you go?
50. What would you rather do if you were able to do it – build your own house by hand with no tools, or swim across the Atlantic Ocean without a lifejacket or rest stops?

For Teens or Young Adults

1. What are your thoughts on abortion for someone who has been raped? Why?
2. What are your thoughts on euthanasia for a cancer patient with dementia? Why?
3. What's going on at school that frustrates you the most?
4. What's going on with your friend that concerns you the most?
5. Describe the kind of person you would want as your best and closest friend.
6. Who do you think is the most important person in the world right now? Why?
7. What three careers do you think you would be best suited for? Why?
8. What is it about the career you'd like to have that sounds intriguing?
9. What is one career you absolutely would not want to have? Why?
10. What is one activity you will do with your children that we have done with you? Why?
11. What is one activity you will not do with your kids that we have done with you? Why?
12. What is one thing we have said to you that you will say to your kids? Why?

13. What is one thing we have said to you that you will not say to your kids? Why?
14. Which of your friends would be best suited to be in charge of our country? Why?
15. Which of your friends would be best suited to be an evangelist? Why?
16. How would you describe the perfect man? (Someone other than Jesus!)
17. How would you describe the perfect woman?
18. What do you think about the idea that God might be an African American woman? Why?
19. Explain what you think the difference is between love and lust.
20. What is the first thing that attracts you to someone of the opposite sex?
21. What do you love most about our church? Why?
22. If there was one thing about our church that you could change, what would it be and how would you change it?
23. What will happen when, or how will you know you are ready to leave home and live on your own?
24. What will happen when, or how will you know you are ready to get married?
25. If you could own a cottage, where would you like it to be? Why?
26. How would you change our family rules if you could? Why?
27. What would you do if you saw a young kid being bullied on the way to school (or at the park)?
28. What do you think are some reasons some kids grow up to be criminals and other kids don't, even if they are from similar neighbourhoods and families?
29. What do you think you could do with \$100 that would change all the lives in a community forever?
30. How do you think a wife should respond to her husband if she disagrees with him?
31. How do you think a husband should respond to his wife if he disagrees with her?
32. How will you know when you are ready to have children?
33. If you were pulled over the police on the highway while you were driving speed limit, what would your first thoughts be?
34. At what age do you think a child should be given a cell phone? Why?

35. If you had to choose an army to fight with in the current war against (pick a country) which army would you choose and why?
36. If you had to write a recipe book with all your favorite foods, what would be some of them?
37. If you could choose just salty foods or just sweet foods for the rest of your life which would you pick?
38. How would you convince someone else to buy you (imagining that people could be sold and marketed like in a commercial)? What features about yourself would you highlight?
39. What do you think would constitute a just war?
40. How can you tell if the person you are engaging with is honest or not?
41. How can you tell if the person you are engaging with for the first time is someone you could get along with as close friends?
42. What would you have to change about yourself to be the perfect spouse/friend/employee/boss?
43. If you could have a 'do over' of something in your life, what would that be and why?
44. If you could go back and change a decision you made recently what would you change?
45. What are some of your financial goals for your life?
46. What are some of your spiritual goals for this month?
47. What are some of your educational goals for yourself?
48. What are some of your career goals for your life?
49. What will need to change in your life to reach your goals?
50. What is one thing you have never shared with anyone? Or... If there is something you have never shared with anyone, why not? (If they answer the first question, thank them for trusting you, assure them you will keep their confidence, and bless them. Any teaching or training or dealing with the issue should happen another time if anything actually needs to be done. Feel blessed that you were allowed a peek into their soul.)

Funny Questions

1. If you crossed a skunk with a butterfly what would you call it? What would it look like? What could it do? What sound would it make?

2. If you crossed a frog with an elephant what would you call it? What would it look like? What could it do? What sound would it make?
3. How would you describe the taste of a peanut butter and butter sandwich?
4. How would you describe the taste of an orange?
5. If you could invent the most unusual soda pop flavour, what would it be?
6. If you could mix and match parts to make the face of the most beautiful woman whose eyes would you use? Whose nose would you use? Whose lips would you use? Whose teeth would you use? Whose hair would you use? Whose cheeks would you use? Whose eyebrows would you use?
7. If you had to write a by-law about sneezing for your town or city, what would it be?
8. What do you think is the most embarrassing thing you could do while sleeping?
9. How would you describe the feeling of cold without using the word cold?
10. What is the worst thing the pastor (or similar) could say at a wedding?
11. What is the worst permanent 'opposite reversal' that could ever happen (no becoming yes, hot becoming cold, etc.)? Why?
12. If you had to buy a birthday present for a snail, what would you buy? Why?
13. What would you name a book that had a rose, a clown and a crowbar on the cover?
14. What do you think would happen if aliens showed up at church this weekend – with their Bibles?
15. What would be the best punishment for someone who tickles other people?