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Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	3
Chapter One	
<i>10 Essential Discussion Tips For All Sensitive Issues.....</i>	<i>6</i>
Chapter Two	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Sex.....</i>	<i>9</i>
Chapter Three	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Death.....</i>	<i>17</i>
Chapter Four	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Divorce.....</i>	<i>23</i>
Chapter Five	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Violence.....</i>	<i>26</i>
Chapter Six	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Alcohol & Drugs.....</i>	<i>30</i>
Chapter Seven	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About HIV/AIDS.....</i>	<i>33</i>
Chapter Eight	
<i>How To Talk To Kids About Tragedies In The Media.....</i>	<i>35</i>
Chapter Nine	
<i>How To Help Kids Cope With Homesickness.....</i>	<i>37</i>

Chapter Ten

How To Prepare Kids For A New Baby.....42

Chapter Eleven

*How To Teach Your Kids About
Tolerance*.....45

Summary.....48

Bonus Report 1 - How To Talk Teach Your Kids About
Money.....49

Bonus Report 2 – How To Help Kids Cope With Moving....51

Bonus Report 3 – 20 Ways To Talk So Your Kids Will
Listen.....54

Bonus Report 4 – How To Talk To Kids About The Death Of
A Pet.....62

Introduction

Talking with kids involves many things, the use of words (what we say and how we say it), ideas and feelings. We communicate in different ways such as with words (kind, unkind, assertive, gentle), with looks (scowls, smiles, frowns), with silence (warm, cold and comfortable), and actions (hugs, slaps, kisses, patting).

Many adults do not have trouble communicating with kids when it simply involves giving directions or instructions (how to ride a bike) or explaining things (why that house caught on fire). They often have difficulty communicating when feelings are involved, be it their kids feelings or their own.

Being able to effectively talk with kids helps to develop warm relationships, cooperation and healthy self-esteem.

Parents struggling to communicate with their kids often leads to conflicts and bickering, kids who simply "switch off" and have low self worth.

As a teacher, I have had many parents and friends approach me for some strategies to use at home to better connect and talk with their kids. I have included in this book many ideas to try, which has worked well for me.

The strategies I suggest in this book will be helpful and suited to many children, but of course all kids have different needs so you will need to improvise and add details where you feel appropriate. I have written this book as a resource guide for talking with kids about sensitive issues and also to give you a starting point.

Talking with your kids in my opinion is the only way you can ensure that they are learning the correct information and the values you wish to instill. You need to be consistent, reliable and open to discussion as much as you possibly can.

The world we live in is constantly changing and evolving. We need to try to help our kids comprehend various issues that even we sometimes struggle to understand.

Any time that a child is curious enough to ask a question, it becomes a teachable moment for us to take advantage. Although we may find some issues difficult to explain, we must try. If we want our kids to remain motivated to come to us to ask questions, we must keep the lines of communication open and offer answers.

Kids want their parents to talk to them about even the toughest issues. They need to have a caring parent who they can depend on for information for many years to come.

If children are old enough to ask a question, then they are old enough to know the correct answers and correct words. The degree of details you give should be modified according to their age and maturity level. After all, we need to keep in mind that when kids ask us questions about sensitive issues, they are often looking for two things in particular, *reassurance* and *information* they can comprehend.

For example, when young children ask us why two people died in a car accident, we need to explain the short and simple facts then follow up with the emotional side of things – that accidents don't always happen to everyone and that they are safe. We shouldn't overwhelm them with details that will only frighten them.

So let's get started. I will cover a large amount of information and tips throughout this book for you to take on board. I hope you find it a useful and valuable resource.

10 Essential Discussion Tips Needed For All Sensitive Issues With Kids

1. **Establish open lines of communication.** Kids desperately want to talk to their parents about tough issues. They do want to ask questions however when parents are open to them. If children feel fearful in asking a question or feel they shall be reprimanded in some way, they will naturally shy away from it.

It is our responsibility to create an open atmosphere where our kids feel confident, relaxed and secure in asking us any question, any time on any topic without fear of consequences.

For example, if your ten year old boy suddenly asks you "Dad, what is masturbation" just as you're tackling a sweeping bend on the highway, try not to overreact. Some of the best conversations take place when we least expect it. If the timing is extremely inconvenient where you are required to seriously concentrate on something else you may respond with "That's a great question but with this tricky road I can't explain right at the moment. We'll have a chat about it after lunch" then make sure you do!

It often takes a few conversations before kids really grasp the information, so be prepared to revisit your chats often.

2. **Start early.** It is natural for young children to turn to their parents first for information. When talking about sensitive issues with kids at a young age you are able to instill your family values and set standards before others influence them.

Teens tend to turn to their peers more for information unless they have established a close and open relationship with their parents. It is important to take advantage of opportunities to discuss sensitive issues as they arise and teach your kids the facts. They will hear lots of myths and misconceptions throughout life, so an accurate knowledge base from an early age is beneficial.

3. **Listen to your kids.** Giving your kids some undivided attention lets them know that what they have to say is important to you and you are interested in listening to them. It is difficult to stop what we're doing sometimes, but as you know, it can be quite off putting when you're trying to talk to someone who is obviously not listening wholeheartedly. For example if they're on the computer, reading the paper or watching TV.

Also try to listen to what they are really asking, as this will help you know how many details they need to know. For example, if your seven year old

asks you "Mum, where did I come from?" before you jump into an in-depth discussion about what you immediately think he is asking, check what he means. He may just want to know what the last town was called where they used to live.

Listening to your kids also fosters their self-esteem. They realise how important they are to us and it teaches them to also listen to others.

4. **Initiate conversations with your kids.** While kids will mostly come and ask questions from time to time, some do not. Therefore it is necessary to initiate conversation with your kids about everyday issues.

Using the media as a tool is helpful. For example, if you are watching TV together and a program comes on about HIV/AIDS, after it is finished ask your child what they thought about the program. Check that they understood what it meant and how it made them feel. Your conversations will stem from the questions you ask.

Remember that the vocabulary you use needs to be appropriate for their age level. Use shorter and simpler words for young children and more technical information for older children. If discussing issues with older children in front of younger ones, it is a good idea to follow up individually later. Younger ones can get lost and confused while listening in to your conversations with older siblings.

5. **Be patient.** Particularly young children take much longer to absorb information and comprehend discussions you have had. Be prepared for them to want to revisit your conversations often and know that this is very normal.

When chatting with your kids, try to let them completely finish their sentences without interrupting. Sometimes they are thinking things through as they speak and that is part of helping them to comprehend the information. Patience and persistence will help the process run smoothly for you both.

6. **Take more initiative.** Once you have had a discussion or even a few with your kids, you too can revisit conversations. You may ask them what they have learnt or what they remember about a particular topic. This way you can check their understanding and correct any misconceptions they may have.
7. **Be informal and relaxed.** Using everyday opportunities to discuss sensitive issues will help your kids feel relaxed and as though they can ask you questions any time.

This is why I suggest NOT having formal discussions about sex or puberty. It gives the impression that these subjects are a little secretive. Bringing up topics as they arise for example when they see something appear on TV, in the paper, down the street, talking about past experiences etc shows that you will talk about these subjects with little fuss at any time.

8. **Use resources.** If you are a little nervous about talking about some issues with your kids, definitely get some resources to help and guide you. Go to the library or bookstore and ask for books relevant for your kid's age group. These are particularly useful for topics like sex and puberty where illustrations can help children's understanding.
9. **Communicate your morals, values and feelings.** Don't hesitate to talk about your beliefs, family morals, values and feelings along with the facts. Kids feel reassured and more secure to hear of the emotional aspects of sensitive issues as it guides them in understanding their own feelings.

Share with your kids how the issues make you feel and how you deal with them. Ask them how they feel too and talk about ways they can deal with the feelings they experience.

Kids do need facts, but reassurance is just as important.

10. **Be honest.** Provide straightforward and truthful answers. Children are very perceptive and if they do not receive an honest answer, they tend to fill in the gaps for themselves, which are often incorrect leaving them confused.

How To Talk To Kids About Sex

Talking with your kids about sex is a subject that many people feel uncomfortable about. As a school teacher of year five and six grade students

for some time, I was required to teach about sex and physical development to a classroom full of students.

My biggest fear at first was that they would get the giggles, go all silly, become embarrassed and that I would be asked questions that are difficult to answer.

To my surprise, the way the children engaged in the discussion amazed me. Initially once I brought up the subject, the kids gave each other a few funny looks, had a quick giggle and only a couple looked embarrassed.

I told them straight out what we were going to talk about and that some people feel awkward talking about this subject. I explained that it is ok to feel awkward, but I was there to talk sensibly and seriously to them about it.

I also explained that I wanted them to feel at ease to ask me any questions they like and asked them to be supportive of one another.

Their response was far more mature that I had imagined, but the amazing part for me was the amount of questions that kept rolling in, even from the usually quiet, reserved children.

They wanted to talk for hours, which we couldn't always do, but we covered a huge amount of information in our allocated timeframe. It made me realise that sex is not a subject to avoid with kids and once the ice is broken, the conversation becomes very natural.

It was also interesting to learn what the kids did and did not know, and it gave me a chance to clear up any misconceptions they had.

Being able to talk to **your own** kids about **the most** intimate subject will make every other subject a cinch. Talking about sex at the right time and in the right way can build a powerful and deep emotional bond between you that facilitates other kinds of communication and trust.

The **single most important thing** when talking to your kids about sex is to make it a positive, joyful subject and link it to loyalty and family and to love and commitment.

A lot of people want to know how they can talk to their kids about sex in a positive way, so that their influence can outweigh that of the peer group and media. In my tips below, I will show you this.

Sometimes parents worry that if they talk about sex with their kids it will encourage them to have sex earlier. This is not true. Kids will hear about sex

from the media, in the playground, on the bus, and from their peers. It is all around us, so it is better that they hear those facts from you plus your family values to guide them in the right direction.

A "big sex talk" in my opinion should not happen as such. It should be an unfolding process where kids learn over time what they need to know. A child's natural curiosity should be satisfied as they mature.

I have however given some age appropriate indications in this book for certain conversations to take place as a guide. I have done this because if by a certain age your child has not asked you anything at all that could even lead to a sex conversation, it may be time for you to initiate some discussions. In some cases they may have heard things about sex already and feel too embarrassed to ask about it.

Speaking about sex in a matter-of-fact way without any silliness will demonstrate to them that sex is not associated with guilt or secrecy. They will learn to use correct terminology without any embarrassment.

It is worth reminding your kids throughout your discussions that sex is private and intimate between people. They can come and ask you anytime they have questions, but it is not a subject we just talk about to anyone, anywhere. Teach them what using discretion means. After all, we don't want them bringing up everything they know or have learnt at your mother's 70th birthday party.

So here are my best tips for helping you to talk to your kids about sex.

1. **What is your attitude about sex?** Ask yourself this question first! How do ***you*** feel about sex and what attitude do you wish to portray to your kids? If you are particularly uncomfortable with the subject, it may help to read some books. You will feel more confident with information fresh in your mind.

It is proven that kids who can openly discuss sex and relationships with their parents are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviour in their teens than those who cannot talk about it with their parents.

Remember – it is okay to admit to your kids if you don't know the answer to one of their questions or haven't heard of something before. After all, kids use lots of new language these days that weren't around when we were younger!

It helps them realise that we too are only human and that we are being honest with them. In my teaching, if I don't know an answer to something,

I'll admit it and we together endeavour to find out the answer. Kids love this because they learn that we tell them the truth always.

- 2. Begin early.** Sometimes the reason why sex can be an uncomfortable subject is because it has never been discussed.

I would suggest that even when your child is a toddler, teach them the proper names for their body parts. Yes, that means calling a penis "a penis" and a vagina "a vagina".

Like I mentioned above, in this way we are never giving them the impression that their body parts are shameful or embarrassing.

When a young child asks, "Where do babies come from?" Depending on their age, you could say that a baby grows from an egg inside mummy's tummy and come out of her vagina.

If they want to know more, don't go down the love making path yet as it is too early. Explain that when a man and woman love each other, they like to be close. The man's sperm joins the woman's egg and a baby starts to grow.

Most kids under the age of about six will accept this information as enough to absorb for now. If they still persist, borrow some age appropriate books from the library that can demonstrate with simple illustrations to satisfy their curiosity.

As your child begins to comprehend more when they grow, you can expand and educate gradually. (See Tips for Talking With 3-7 Year Olds)

- 3. You take the lead.** Sometimes kids aren't sure whether to bring up the subject of sex with their parents. We as parents should take the initiative to bring it up if your kids haven't already started to ask questions by the age of 7.

For example, an easy way to instigate a conversation with an eight-year-old child is when you both see a pregnant woman. This woman may be a relative, friend, friend's mum or whoever. You could say "Did you notice that Aunt Charlotte's tummy is getting bigger? She is having a baby and it's growing inside her. Do you know how the baby got inside her?"

Our children do need to know the biological facts, however modify and simplify the details according to your child's age.

- 4. Discuss the emotional aspect and responsibilities of sex.** The facts about sex are important, yet so too are the reasons *why* people have sex. Be sure to include in your discussions that sexual relationships involve care, concern and responsibility.

Pre-teens (that is eleven and twelve year olds) must learn the responsibilities and consequences of having sex. Depending on your religious beliefs and family values, you may want to consider educating them on the various protection methods.

I recently learnt that kids who grow up thinking of sex as a wonderful, spectacular miracle that not only makes babies but can also bind couples and families together in a loyal, happy way are more likely to avoid early, dangerous sex. Symbolise this positive approach with words like "beautiful" and "special".

Kids who visualise sex with these emotions, linked to such values may appreciate the true meaning behind sex. After all, we do want our kids to one day have a happy family of their own. Incorporate sex as a matter of love and family in your discussions.

Talking to your kids about the emotions, values and responsibilities linked to sex will help them make better informed decisions later on and be more resilient to peer pressure.

- 5. Talk about dating.** Children need to hear the importance of getting to know another person before engaging in sex. There is plenty of time to get to know each other first. Give examples, like going to the movies, holding hands and playing sport together.

Kids often see in the movies how quickly a relationship may end up in bed. Remind them that in real life there is plenty of time to get to know one another and all of that too is part of a caring relationship.

- 6. Be precise.** As a parent, you need to judge how much information you wish to disclose to your kids, depending on their age. Keep in mind though that if they do ask you a question out of the blue, it is highly likely they have seen or heard some kind of information at school or somewhere else and have come to you for clarification.

Embrace this and tell them what they are requesting. Use accurate language like vagina, penis, testicles and breasts. Don't circle around a point as they will become confused, lose interest and seek information elsewhere. So get to the point and use your wise judgement as to the degree of details you give.

7. **Anticipate approaching development.** I felt so grateful that I had taught physical development to my year six-class well before we went away together on a school excursion. It was inevitable that some of the girls on the trip got their period for the first time that week.

I was so relieved that they felt relaxed enough to come and ask me for support when this big event happened to them. I was certain it would not have been like this if we had not comfortably talked about these changes earlier in the school year.

The same goes for parenting. Create an open and relaxed talking environment and your kids will continue to approach you.

Which brings me to my point – it is crucial to educate your kids about their current stage of development and also the approaching stage too. Bodies going through puberty can change rapidly so you want your kids to be prepared for what lies ahead. This will help reduce confusion, anxiety and feeling frightened when changes occur.

8. **Relax.** The way you respond to talking about sex with your kids is more important than having all the answers to their questions. If you want your kids to feel comfortable talking to you, they need to be made feel as though any subject, including sex is allowed to be discussed in your home.

I mentioned earlier that you should try to let your discussions about sex unfold naturally as curiosity evolves. There are times though when kids do not ask many questions and so we as parents need to instigate some discussions.

I have provided below some tips for possible discussions within certain age brackets, just as a guide for you to refer to. Ultimately though it is up to you to use your discretion and what you feel is appropriate.

Tips For Talking With 3 – 7 Year Olds

Until kids are seven or eight years old, respond to their questions with simple and positive answers. If a five or six year old asks you where babies come from, tell them "When a mummy and daddy love each other so much they are able to make a baby together. It is very special". See if that satisfies their curiosity. You may need to give a few more details if requested.

Encourage your kids to feel good about themselves and their bodies. A healthy attitude about sex develops with how they feel about their body.

Expose your kids to the emotions of loyalty, love and commitment as a family. Share stories that resemble this from your childhood. If you didn't feel these qualities, talk about what you would have liked. Share how you remember your parents showing their love for each other and then tell them how much you love your spouse.

Talk about stories that show family loyalty for example, cheering on your little sister at the athletics carnivals, helping your brother on the weekend, when daddy took special time to build you a cubby house etc. Kids love to hear your stories as well and they teach them your values.

If you grew up in difficult circumstances, share it with your kids if appropriate and reassure them you will always be there for them.

Tips For Talking With 7-8 Year Olds

Around the age of eight years old is a great time to start a more detailed conversation about sex. Most kids this age are innocent, curious about their world, open and willing to please. They haven't yet really learnt to be embarrassed about this topic.

Depending on your child's environment until now they may or may not have heard much about sex. Whatever the case, a committed and prepared parent will be able to clarify, correct and expand on any perceptions they already have.

When your child asks you a question, or you decide to initiate a discussion, try to have it when you're both in a comfortable, familiar place, free from interruptions or distractions. Ensure neither of you are especially tired or feeling unwell.

It is fantastic if both parents can be involved in the discussion, as you don't want sex to be a taboo subject. It also gives the child the impression that both parents are approachable to talk about sex at any time. But if this is not possible, one parent is fine.

Be prepared and pick out a picture book from a bookstore or library to refer to in your discussions. Ask bookstore owners or librarians for some advice on appropriate books for your child's age group. Having one or two books is enough. The book needs to have a nice tone of importance balanced with lightness so the child does not feel at all oppressed.

Read through the book you chose beforehand and think about where you might want to chat further and how you wish to explain concepts. Your child will probably stop you at times for more clarification. Try to anticipate some

questions they may ask you and how you wish to respond. Remember to be honest and keep the conversation positive.

Once you have had a good talk to your eight year old, you can expect them to come back to you numerous times with more questions. It is normal that they may forget certain points and need further explanations.

In your discussions, teach them that there is a time and place for talking about sex. It is not a secret or anything to be ashamed of, however it is a private and special connection between people.

Tips For Talking With 9 – 13 Year Olds

At this age kids are usually very interested and intrigued to have a conversation about sex and physical development. As they are maturing during these years they will feel grown up to be having these chats with you.

Being able to talk to kids about sex at this age has its advantages. They are generally not yet hormonally or emotionally ready for sex so they still tend to look at it objectively. Teaching your kids what to do at this age means you will spend less time doing it when they're older and possibly more inclined to avoid the conversation.

Building a positive framework about sex with your child to this point lays strong foundations for when they hit adolescence. Having had previous discussions helps you become more approachable down the track.

There are ways to initiate conversations about sex with this age group. Firstly, be aware and open to when sexual dialogue, innuendos or images arise around your kids. Be it at the movies, in a magazine, on a billboard, from their peer group or information given at school.

Initiate follow up discussions by making conversation about what they have seen or heard. For example, "Did you enjoy that movie? Do you think Mary and Joe did the right thing getting together? What do you think is their attitude about sex?" or "You know how on that billboard it is referring to sex. What do you think it is trying to say?" or "Did you talk about sex in your physical development class today? What did you learn?"

Reinforce to your child that it is completely okay to come and ask you any questions they may have at anytime. Keep your talk positive and non-judgmental, especially if they tell you what their peers say. Remind them that sometimes people make jokes about sex because they think it is gross and they

don't quite understand it. Reinforce that sex is a natural and magnificent way to show love and care in a relationship.

As I mentioned earlier, this is a crucial age to talk about puberty and physical development before it hits them. Use the opportunity to also talk about sex. Most schools engage in physical and sex education classes of some kind each year, so keep an eye out when these will be conducted and try to talk with your kids beforehand.

These classes can sometimes be a bit of a shock to kids if they haven't discussed sex much at home, as it can be confusing to hear terms and language used they don't understand. Follow up afterwards with questions such as "What new things did you learn in sex education?" or "Is there anything you heard that you're still not sure about?" Reward their openness in talking to you, for example "That's great Henry, you're being really mature about this and must have listened carefully".

Talking to your kids about sex, development and relationships can be really enjoyable and the rewards are endless. Try to let it evolve naturally by being open and honest when they are a young age. Once you get started you will not look back.

How To Talk To Kids About Death

Discussing death with your kids can be a real concern and many tend to avoid it. Death is however an inevitable part of life and it is our responsibility to ensure our kids are aware of it and know it's okay to discuss it.

If we allow children to talk to us about death, we can give them needed information, prepare them for a crisis, and help them when they are upset. We can encourage their communication by showing attention and respect for what they have to say. We can also make it easier for them to talk to us if we are open, honest, and at ease with our own feelings.

Death is very much a part of our lives on many different levels. We may be surprised at how aware children already are about death. They see dead insects, dead birds and animals on the road or a family pet may have died. Children read about death in their fairy tales, watch it in cartoons and even role-play death in school plays. Without realising it they already have some exposure to the concept.

Problems That Make Discussing Death Difficult

1. We avoid talking about things that upset us. We bottle it up and hope that by saying nothing will help it go away. Children are sensitive barometers of emotion and are tremendous observers. They know something is wrong by simply watching us. Our body language, emotions on our faces, what we say and what we don't say are all communicating a message to our kids.

When we choose not to discuss an issue with our kids they too hesitate to ask questions. They automatically think "If Mummy and Daddy are so upset that they can't talk about it, I had better not talk about it either.....it must be bad!". This causes our kids to stress and worry more as they don't know how we are feeling.

2. We feel uncomfortable when we don't have all the answers. As a teacher and parent myself, kids will often expect us to know everything, even all about death. Take it as a compliment and know that they look up to us.

It is okay to say to your child "I'm not sure myself about that" or "I just don't know the answer to that". Children respond to this honesty beautifully and feel connected in our openness towards them. It helps them feel better about not knowing everything also. In discussing death, we may find different answers at different stages in our life or grieving process.

Share with children your beliefs. Expose them to the belief of others, for example some people believe in afterlife, others do not. Allow them to be comforted in knowing your beliefs and allow them to choose their own.

3. Death is often a taboo subject – in some cultures death is an integral part of family life. People died in their home environment, surrounded by loved ones (adults and children alike). They comforted each other and mourned together.

Unfortunately today death is much lonelier. Many people die in isolation and loved ones miss sharing their last moments. The living has in some ways become separated from the dying; consequently, death has taken on added mystery and, for some, added fear.

Help to diminish this trend and openly discuss death with your child when an appropriate time arises. Model appropriate behaviour regarding death, for example express your sympathy towards someone who has lost a loved one in front of your child. Show them that it is kind to acknowledge a loss and express care towards others.

Developmental Stages of Understanding – A General Guide

- Preschool children mostly see death as temporary, reversible and impersonal. In stories they read or watch characters will often suddenly rise up alive again after being totally destroyed. It's not surprising they don't understand, yet it is appropriate for their age level to think this way.
- Between the ages of five and nine, most children are beginning to see that all living things eventually die and that death is final. They tend to not relate it to themselves and consider the idea that they can escape it. They may associate images with death, such as a skeleton. Some children have nightmares about them.
- From nine through to adolescence, children to begin to understand fully that death is irreversible and that they too will die some day.

It is important to remember however that all children develop at different rates and that children experience life uniquely. They have their own personal ways of handling and expressing emotions.

It is not uncommon for a three year old to ask questions about death, for a child to be openly unconcerned about the death of a grandparent yet devastated over the death of a pet. Some children show their understanding of death through playing with their toys.

It is important to explain death in simple terms for young children. For example, when someone dies they don't breathe, or eat, or feel hungry or cold and you won't be able to see them again.

No matter how children cope with death or express their feelings, they need sensitive and nonjudgmental responses from adults. Careful listening and observing are important ways to learn how to respond appropriately to a child's needs.

Talking About Death With Preschoolers or Young Children

Many people feel challenged when approaching the subject of death to preschoolers and young children. They in particular need brief and simple explanations. Using concrete and familiar examples may help. For example, death may be made more clear by explaining it in terms of the absence of familiar life functions - when people die they do not breathe, eat, talk, think, or feel any more; when dogs die they do not bark or run any more; dead flowers do not grow or bloom any more.

Children learn through repetition so they may need to go over this quite a few times. A child may immediately ask more questions, others may be silent, then wish to revisit the subject again later. Children sometimes get confused with what they hear so it is important you check their understanding by revisiting the subject at appropriate times.

As time passes and children have new experiences, they will need further explanations and sharing of ideas and thoughts.

It may take time for a child to comprehend fully the ramifications of death and its emotional implications. A child who knows that Uncle Tom has died may still ask why Aunt Julie is crying. The child needs an answer. "Aunt Julie is crying because she is sad that Uncle Tom has died. She misses him very much. We all feel sad when someone we care about dies."

There are also moments when we have trouble "understanding" what children are asking us. A question that may seem dreadfully thoughtless to an adult may be a child's request for reassurance. For instance, a question such as, "When will you die?" needs to be heard with the realisation that the young child perceives death as temporary.

While the permanency of death is not yet fully understood, a child may think that death means separation, and separation from parents and the loss of care involved are frightening.

Being cared for is a realistic and practical concern, and a child needs to be

reassured. Possibly the best way to answer a question is by asking a clarifying question in return: "Are you worried that I won't be here to take care of you?" If that is the case, the reassuring and appropriate answer would be something like, "I don't expect to die for a long time. I expect to be here to take care of you as long as you need me, but if I did die, there are lots of people to take care of you. There's Daddy, Aunt Laura and Uncle John or Nan."

It is important to check which words you use when discussing death with your kids. Some children confuse death with sleep, particularly if they hear adults refer to death with one of the many euphemisms for sleep – "they died in their sleep", "eternal rest", "rest in peace." Resulting from this confusion, a child may be afraid of going to bed, incase they don't wake up either!

Similarly, if children are told that someone who died "went away", brief separations may begin to worry them. Grandpa "went away" and hasn't come back yet. Maybe Mummy won't come back from the shops or from work. Therefore, it is important to avoid such words as "sleep", "rest", or "went away" when talking to a child about death.

To avoid confusion with preschoolers and very young children, it helps to explain that only very serious illness may cause death. When they hear that sickness was the cause of death, we don't want them to assume that minor ailments are a cause for major concern.

When a child associates death only with old age, they can become very confused when they learn that young people can die too. It is important to explain that *most* people live a long time, but some don't. However we do expect that we will live a very long time (always reassure them)!

Religious References

Religion is a real source of strength for many people in a time of grieving. If however religion has not played a part in your child's life before dealing with death, it may be very confusing and worrying to hear religious references. For example, the explanation "Big sister is with God now" may comfort an adult, but frighten a child. They may fear that God will come and take them away as He did big sister. Ensure that your child has an affiliation for your terms so they feel familiar and can understand.

Other messages may confuse children, including statements such as "Tommy is happy in Heaven with the angels". They may wonder why everyone is so unhappy when they say that Tommy is happy. They need to hear about the sadness being felt from losing Tommy, along with our expressions of religious faith.

It is important to help children understand the realities of death, being the loss and the grief. Trying to shelter children from these realities only denies them from the opportunity to express their feelings and be comforted. Sharing feelings between you and your child will benefit you both.

Other Opportunities To Talk About Death

Children tend to be extremely curious when they discover death, particularly dead flowers, birds, trees and insects. This may open windows of opportunity to discuss death further and answer all the detailed questions that may arise. Try to reinforce the concept that all living things eventually die, but it makes room for new things to join us on earth.

Other opportunities to discuss death with your kids arise when well-known persons die and their funeral receives a lot of media coverage. This is a natural time to clarify any misunderstandings they may have about death. If the death is violent or aggressive however, you need to reassure your child that they are safe and most people do not behave this way towards each other.

Attending Funerals

If your child is to attend a funeral, they need to be prepared beforehand for what they might see and hear before, during and after the service. Explain that it is a very sad occasion and that some people will be crying and others feeling very sad.

Seat your child next to you or someone they are familiar with who is able to cope with their questions and be prepared to offer explanations. If your child prefers to not attend the funeral, they must not be forced.

Mourning

We all need to mourn in order to heal our sorrows and move on in our lives. By being open with our emotions and showing our sorrow and tears, expresses to our children that it is okay that they also feel sad and cry. We should never associate tears and expressing feelings with weakness.

Children often feel guilty and angry when they lose a close family member. They need reassurance that they have been, and will continue to be, loved and cared for.

In Summary

A grieving child needs information that is clear and comprehensible for their development level. They need a lot of reassurance that they are safe and loved

and be made feel that they can discuss their feelings openly. Children need to maintain their activities and interests as they desire and revisit questions regularly.

When preparing a child for an anticipated death, allow them to help care for the dying person if they desire, receive lots of affection and answer questions, be given information about the physical, emotional, and mental condition of the terminally ill person and be given a choice of visiting or remaining away.

How To Talk To Kids About Divorce

The first things you should consider when getting a divorce is how, when and what to tell your children. The way the information is delivered will set the tone for a child's response. Children will naturally be anxious and worried. You need to keep in mind that your kids will need to know that:

- You still love them no matter what;
- Neither you or the other parent are rejecting them;
- They are not the cause of the divorce;
- They still have a family even though their parents are no longer together;
- There is a reason for the divorce (and have an explanation ready – with not *too* many details).

Tips For Talking To Your Kids To Help Them Through A Divorce

1. **Timing** – Talking to your kids about divorce should happen sooner rather than later. If possible, it is best to tell your kids together. Try to discuss what you want to tell them beforehand. This will avoid the kids hearing two different versions of events.

Even though the marital relationship is dissolving, they need to feel a sense of trust in the parental relationship. You may begin by saying "For a long time, Mum and Dad have not been getting along. We have tried in lots of ways to make our marriage happier, but we are still not happy with each other. We have decided not to live together and get a divorce".

Some things will need to change and other things will stay the same. Children may want to know who they will live with, when they will see each of you and where they will go to school. If you know the answers, tell them then, otherwise be honest and promise to tell them once it is sorted out.

2. **Reassure your child.** Tell them that it is okay to feel sad because they will sometimes miss the other parent. Ensure they feel a sense of security.

Most children older than four or five years old feel somehow responsible for the divorce. Remind them that the divorce has nothing to do with anything naughty they may have done in the past and how proud of them you both are.

Reassure them that you are both considering their feelings too when making important decisions and that things will begin to improve. Tell them how much you both love them and always will.

3. **Be honest.** Try to be as honest as possible with your kids. Small kids can get confused with too many details so try to keep your explanations simple but truthful.

Important decisions such as living arrangements should be shared as soon as they're made.

4. **Accept anger and disappointment.** Listen to how your kids are feeling and know that it is natural for them to have these emotions. Again reassure them that you both love them and that they will still have special and fun times with them.
5. **Be fair** when discussing the other parent. Unless your former partner has a history of harming your kids, it is harder on them if you belittle your spouse.

It is painful for kids to be pressured to take sides and listen to an enraged parent. Try to find the strength to be civil towards and about each other. While you may not feel like it, it will be far kinder to your child and less painful for them to deal with.

Kids know that they are a part of both of you. It is hurtful for them to hear awful things about the other parent as it is also a part that belongs to them.

6. **Provide stability.** Although major changes may need to happen like moving towns and jobs, try to maintain your kids familiar routines as much as possible. For example, keep bedtimes, meal times and having friends over consistent. Kids feel their safest in a familiar environment.

Remember to give your kids lots of affection to reassure them of your love and support. Make changes in their lives slowly and let them share how they feel about the changes. Praise them for making an effort to help with the changes.

Allow your kids to maintain a positive relationship with both parents and show your kids that you trust them to adapt to the changes.

7. **Be flexible.** You may need to alter your explanations depending on the age of your kids and the information they desire. Chances are, older children may not be too surprised about the divorce as they have sensed

unsettled feelings for some time. They may be relieved in some ways that it is being aired.

8. **Be open and approachable.** Be prepared to revisit discussions with your kids often. Even if you've talked a lot in the beginning, tell your kids they can talk to you about the divorce whenever they need to. You may sometimes ask them how they are coping. When you instigate the conversation occasionally it gives them the message that it is okay to talk about the divorce.
9. **Never ask your child to deliver a message.** If you need to talk to your ex-spouse about something, tell them yourself or write them a letter. It is terribly unfair to use a child as a buffer and put them in an awkward situation.
10. **Show lots of support.** Support your child's need to visit their other parent and their desire to love you both. Tell them it is ok and you support this. It will help them to cope even better.

A Few DO NOTS:

- never ask your kids which parent they love more;
- never use your kids as a counsellor – find an adult to fulfil these needs for you.

Always – stop and think about how your words may affect your kids. When your kids are old enough to understand what you have been through, they will admire and appreciate you even more for caring about their needs.

How To Talk To Kids About Violence

Violence in our world today is all around our kids, in the media, in our communities and even in our schools. Our kids are exposed to images and stories that are unavoidable and can be very frightening for them.

As parents, the best thing we can do to help our kids cope with violent issues is to be available to talk, give reliable and accurate information and instil our family values about the issues.

Here are some tips that I suggest to help you talk to your kids so they can cope with violence.

1. **Encourage your kids to talk about what they see and hear.** Tune in to your child's feelings and encourage them to discuss what they've seen and heard. You might initiate a conversation by saying "That TV show we just watched seemed pretty scary to me, what did you think?" or "How do you feel after watching so many people get injured? I feel very sorry for them, what about you?" and see where the conversation leads.

Your kids will feel better when they talk about their feelings. It lifts the burden of facing fears on their own.

If your child feels depressed, angry or persecuted, it is very important to reassure them that you love them and talk about their worries.

If your child has been violent or a victim of violence, provide them with a safe place to express their feelings.

Find out what your kids have heard at school. If needed, give them factual information to dispel any misconceptions.

Give information at age appropriate levels and put events into context. Explain that even though frightening things happen sometimes to people, most times people go about their day without any harm.

2. **Limit exposure to violence.** Research has proven that children who watch a lot of violence on TV, movies or video games feel less safe than those that don't or it may desensitise them to violence.

Try to be involved with your kids and talk about the things you see and play together. For example, remind your kids that the heroes they see on TV such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger are acting a part. If they acted like that in real life they would end up in big trouble.

Let your child know your values, for example "Violence just isn't funny to me. I know that games and movies are not real, but when people get seriously hurt in real life it is terribly sad for everyone involved". Watching the news and movies together provides opportunities to reinforce the consequences of violence.

Ways to tone down the effects of violent messages are:

- Limit TV viewing to appropriate programs;
- Go on-line together and choose fun sites that are appropriate;
- Supervise your child's exposure to all forms of media;
- If needed – install monitoring tools to block inappropriate material on the internet and TV;
- Take notice of TV ratings provided for programs and movies and act accordingly.

3. **Reassure your child.** Kids who see or hear about violent acts can become anxious and fearful that a similar act may happen to them or a loved one.

Always reassure your child by telling them they are safe and lots of people are here to watch them. For example, you may reassure them by giving them options of what to do if they ever feel unsafe when they're not at home. Like go to a trusted adult, a teacher or family friend.

Remind them that they can always tell you when they are afraid in any situation. Talk about the police and what a fantastic job they do at dealing with these sort of problems and keeping the community safe.

Provide a consistent and supportive environment to help reduce your kids fears and anxieties.

4. **Stand firm.** The values you wish to instil in your kids need to be clear and consistent. Don't fall for the "everybody else does it" or "everyone else is allowed to watch it" trick. You need to explain to your kids why you do not allow violence in your home so they can accept your decision.

For example you might say "Your father and I don't agree with the message that show sends. Watching violence is not enjoyable and we don't tolerate it in our family".

5. **Let your kids know your standards.** Talk to your kids about teasing and its limits. Let them know that teasing can be bullying and can go further than what you sometimes intend. Tell them that in your family you have zero tolerance for bullying or roughhousing.

If your child is violent towards another, put them on "time-out" or whatever disciplinary strategy you prefer. Once they are calm, ask them about why they have behaved or reacted in that way. Together, work out a peaceful way using words to resolve problems without using violence. (I offer more advice on this in my free newsletter).

6. **Offer tools to cope with feelings.** Suggest ways that your child could cope with feelings if they are prone to getting violent. Insist the importance of using words and not being physical! For example, you could say "When Jose takes your toy, you could first ask her nicely for it back. If that doesn't work you could walk out of the room and begin playing with something else. Ignoring her might stop her next time " or "Take a few deep breaths and come and chat to me about it, you will feel better if you talk about it".
7. **Talk about groups.** When an appropriate time arises, discuss with your child why kids form gangs. They're people who need to belong to a particular group and feel supported by others. Find out what they know about gangs. Use their stories to branch off into further discussion. You can talk about how these kids feel that it is cool to create hurt in numbers, but it is not.

Explain that the problem is, many kids in gangs end up getting more hurt themselves, even killed as they put themselves in dangerous situations. Wise kids choose friends who are fun to be with and care for each other.

8. **Educate your kids.** Give them options and prepare them for what to do if they are faced in situations where they feel unsafe. For example if they see a gun at a friend's place or at school, to NEVER touch it and walk away. Tell an adult straight away as this will keep you and your friends safe.

If another child seems to be picking on your child, explain to them that bullies usually feel unhappy about something. Picking on others is a way they try to make themselves feel better, therefore they should realise that the bully has some problems to deal with.

Encourage your kids to not let a bully provoke them and not to get down to their level. Calmly stand tall and say something like "I'm not going to argue or fight with you". Remind your kids that they don't ever have to

handle these types of situations on their own. You are there for them as support and can intervene if the situation becomes a problem.

9. **Control your own behaviour.** Examine how you approach conflict and know that your child is learning from you and may model the same behaviours. Ask yourself – how do you settle an argument? When you're angry, how do you deal with it? You must model the right behaviour if you want your child to avoid being violent.
10. **Seek support.** If you feel as though you need more information and help, do seek support from your doctor, members of the community and other parents.

How To Talk To Kids About Alcohol & Drugs

Several surveys reveal that kids who feel comfortable talking to their parents about their feelings and concerns are more likely to stay free from drugs and excessive alcohol use.

Here are 8 tips for talking about drugs and alcohol with your kids:

1. **Provide information appropriate to their age.** Simple information repeated on relevant occasions should get the message across about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. For example, if your seven year old is eating some fruit, you may talk with them about how the fruit is good for and healthy for their body.

Talk about other things that are good and healthy too. Then move into talking about things that some people do that are not good for their body like smoking or taking medicine that is not needed.

When drug terms are exposed in the media or in conversations, for example cocaine, marijuana and speed, ask your child if they know what it is or what it means. Tell them they are addictive drugs that harm our bodies severely. If they ask for more information give it to them.

The older your children get, the more information they may seek. Ensure you are up to date with drug street names and how they affect our body so you can give them the right information. We don't always know all the answers but the more facts we can tell them early on, without scaring them, the more wary they will be.

2. **Indicate your family values.** Tell your kids how you feel about drug use and alcohol consumption and what is acceptable in your family. For example "In our family we do not agree with taking any drugs unless mum, dad or the doctor says so. It is dangerous to give it to yourself so our rule is very serious. Some people have made mistakes in taking too many drugs and they have become very sick and some have died" or "In our family we do not drink alcohol until we are an adult. It is very bad for your body and strength when you are young". Answer any questions that arise.
3. **Reinforce messages.** Whenever an appropriate time arises or you initiate a conversation about drugs, repeat the dangers and consequences of drugs. Be informative about the facts and answer questions.
4. **Model your beliefs.** Show your kids that you practise what you preach. Avoid drinking excessively if you want them to be responsible drinkers. Try not to drink each and every night of the week if you don't want them to

do the same and always offer guests non-alcoholic drinks along with alcohol to show that what you drink is optional. Also, if you take a lot of vitamins or tablets yourself, do it discreetly.

5. **Trust your kids.** Give your kids the opportunity to do the right thing. If they choose to break your rules, then punish appropriately. Praise them when they are trustworthy and responsible and tell them you know you can trust them. In my experience, if you tell kids "no" all of the time or not let them go out at all, they will almost break their necks to do it sooner or later.

Educate and explain to your kids your values, standards and rules and then trust them to make the right decisions.

6. **Give your kids responsibility.** Learning from a young age that choices come with responsibility will help your child feel more secure in decision making in their teens. Learning the consequences of bad choices at an early age help them make better ones in the future. The responsibilities may be simple.

Eg: For an eight year old, let them decide which musical instrument to learn, which job they want to do around the house one week, how many people to ask to their party etc. This will help your child be confident to make decisions for themselves.

7. **Foster self-esteem.** As mentioned earlier, mostly kids with low self esteem turn to excessive alcohol and substance abuse to feel better. Foster self esteem at home by giving your kids quality time each day where you can solely focus on them, to talk, to play a game, go for a walk, offer praise and encouragement, set achievable tasks and tell them how much you love them.
8. **Talk about peer pressure.** Kids need to know that "good friends" are there to care for them and listen to them. People who try to pressure them into smoking, drinking or using drugs are not friends. Encourage your kids to engage in healthy activities like sport that help them feel fit, energetic and good about themselves.
9. **Discuss how to say "no".** Providing scenarios for your kids actually gets them to think on their feet and helps them to say "no" in a pressured situation. Give your child scenarios such as "Just say you are at Eleanor's house and she finds some of her mum's cigarettes. She asks you to share one with her. What would you say?"

Praise your child if she comes up with a good response, otherwise offer some alternatives like "No thanks, I don't like smoking. I need to keep my lungs in top shape for netball on Saturday".

10. **Explain.** It is a good idea to explain to your kids why some people take drugs, smoke and drink excessively. While there are many different reasons explain that sometimes people have a big problem with no-one to talk to so they turn to these substances. Some people try them and get addicted. Ask them why they think people use these substances, find out what they know and how they feel about it too.
11. **Help them discriminate.** Remind your kids that while it is extremely dangerous to take substances excessively, not everything is lethal. For example, some drugs help us to get better when we are sick, but only ones given by a doctor, mum or dad. It is never ok to take medicines out of the cupboard yourself.

Depending on your beliefs, you may like to explain that adults sometimes enjoy a glass of alcohol every now and then. It is when too much is consumed too often that it becomes dangerous.

You may wonder when is the best time to start telling your kids about drug and alcohol consumption. Kids are learning and being exposed to drugs and alcohol from younger and younger ages. Gradually increase your kid's information as they get more curious and ask more questions. Start to encourage them to take care of themselves and take pride in their healthy bodies from as early as possible.

How To Talk To Kids About HIV & AIDS

Firstly, it is important to know the facts yourself about HIV/AIDS so you are prepared to discuss the subject when your kids are ready. Brush up on your knowledge by reading some books and fact sheets so you are confident in discussing the subject.

Unfortunately it is a topic that is often misunderstood and can leave kids feeling upset and confused.

Sharing accurate facts with your kids will help to keep them safe and feel more secure.

Steps For Talking About HIV/AIDS With Your Kids

1. **Introduce the subject** – Wait for an appropriate time to initiate a conversation about HIV/Aids. For example, when they see an advertisement about AIDS on TV or an event occurs related to AIDS, find out what they already know by asking "Do you know what AIDS is?" or "What do you know about AIDS?".
2. **Give accurate information** – Alter the details you give depending on your child's age. For example, for a seven year old, you might say "AIDS is a disease that can make people very sick. It is caused by a tiny germ or virus, called HIV.

For an older child, ten or eleven years old for example, they will be able to understand more information like "Our bodies are made up of billions of cells. Among those cells are T-cells which help us fight off diseases and illnesses. If you get a virus called HIV, it kills out T-cells. Then if a person gets sick, they don't have the T-cells to protect them, then that person has AIDS".

Pre-teens and teens need to understand how condoms help protect people from contracting HIV and that the disease can be transmitted by sharing drug needles. Although – if you have not yet talked about sex with your kids, don't make the initial conversation be about AIDS. Revisit it after you have talked about sex in a brighter light.

3. **Revisit facts with your kids.** This is particularly important for younger kids as HIV/AIDS can be a lot to absorb. They will need to be reminded from time to time of the facts.

Kids at school can confuse each other so it is important to set the record straight to ensure they have the right information. For example, if your

seven year old comes home from school upset because they were near someone who grazed themselves....and the other kids told him he would get AIDS. Explain that they don't have AIDS and can only get it if both their body fluids mix with someone who already has AIDS.

4. **Praise Your Kids.** Foster self esteem in your family and with your kids. Praise them often, keep up with their interests and set realistic goals. It is important that your kids feel good about themselves, as then they are more likely to not do drugs and withstand peer pressure to have sex before they are ready. In other words, it may help prevent them acting in ways that are at risk to contracting AIDS.
5. **Prepare to talk about death.** Children may begin to enquire more about death when discussing AIDS. Offer reassurance and stress that AIDS is preventable and because we know the facts and what to do, we are quite safe.

How To Talk To Kids About Tragedies In The Media

Young children, teens and even adults may be disturbed by images and stories of people getting hurt in the media or on TV. Children can become anxious and fearful about the world around them. It is important to keep an eye on your TV guide at the start of each week and be aware of what is scheduled during your children's viewing time.

Try to watch television with your kids (especially during the News), listen for their questions and answer them honestly. Tragedies affect everyone, both children and adults. Children need to talk about their fears, frustration and disbelief. It is important that we are watchful for these emotions and encourage open discussions.

Children may be worry:

- that the event could happen to themselves or a loved one;
- that they could be separated from someone they love or be left alone;
- about their safety or that of their loved ones.

Depending on their age and level of maturity, children will perceive things differently to adults. Remember with younger children (up to nine years old) to be uncomplicated in your explanations without going in to gory details, especially if the tragedy is extremely unpleasant. Be supportive and reassuring during your discussion. Older children will be able to handle more information.

Discussion Techniques:

- **Be truthful** – Children need to understand what is happening around them to feel secure. Provide them with facts about what happened and acknowledge it was a terrible and frightening event. Help them to see that we share their feelings.
- **Encourage any questions** – Ensure your child feels as though they can approach you to ask questions as much as they need. Sometimes a child will process a tragic event much later and come back to you again for more discussion. Remind them that questions are welcome.
- **Feelings are normal** – Some children may take a while to get over tragic events and that is perfectly normal. Allow them to cry if they need to and show their emotions. Share your feelings about what happened with them. Help your kids to verbalise their feelings with you. Secure them with a warm cuddle and remind them that they are safe. Keep things in

perspective and remind them that not all people are harmful towards others.

Unfortunately over the past few years in particular, we have been exposed to numerous mass killings that have been disturbing and heartbreaking for all of us. Images in the media and discussions around the world can be quite alarming for our kids. It is imperative that we recognise these events and explain what has happened.

Sometimes our kids hear stories from others that may not be correct, so it is up to us to ensure they have the right perception.

When talking about tragedy to kids, your choice of words really depends on the age of the children. In any case though you should:

- Ensure they feel safe – explain to them that it is a real misfortune what has happened and that we all feel for those people who were there or are experiencing pain.
- Stay close by and show affection as they desire – give them a hug and reassure them that their world is safe. Keep them among familiar things until they're feeling more secure, for example family and friends.
- Allow the children to talk about it and how it has made them feel. Honestly answer their questions and try to put their minds at ease. By not talking about it may make them think it is taboo.
- Be watchful for behavioral changes – kids who are behaving differently, such as not sleeping at night, feel frightened, don't want mum to go to work, they want to start sleeping in with you may need some more reassurance, time and talking. If it continues it might be time to seek professional help.
- For teens – talk with them, listen and ask questions. Stabilise the subject by asking "What are your friends saying about it? How are you feeling?" Make sure they're receiving the true facts. Tell them you're there for them.

Helping Kids Cope With Homesickness

Both my husband and I went away to boarding school when we were twelve years old and suffered badly from homesickness for the first few years. So speaking from experience, I know it can be terribly painful for kids *and* their parents.

When parents try to help their kids be involved in camps, excursions and holidays to enjoy the outdoors, explore new environments and make new friends, they sometimes feel unsure of what to do when their child keeps calling and pleading to come home.

Most parents find that if given time, the majority of kids do adjust and feel happy again. All kids are different though so you need to figure out what is right for your child.

Homesickness Symptoms

Homesickness is very common, especially among children. It is natural for them to feel some anxiety and fear when separated from their parents and home.

Homesickness typically lessens with age as they discover that while they still miss home, they are able to still have fun. With maturity and time, homesickness can be managed where people can put their feelings into a little more perspective. The degree of homesickness and when it will lessen varies individually.

Kids who are homesick generally feel sad and depressed. They may feel sick, cry, withdraw from activities, cling to an available motherly or fatherly figure, find it hard to sleep plus more. It is very important to understand what your child thinks and feels about being apart *before* the separation occurs.

How To Help Your Child

Whether your child is going away to camp, to a friend's place for a week, on an excursion, to boarding school or wherever, here are some things you can do to help your child cope.

1. **Make sure *your child wants to go*.** Younger children may view being sent away to camp as a type of rejection, especially if they were not involved in the decision to go.

Do not send your child away because it is what the other siblings did at that age or because the experience might help them overcome certain

things such as shyness, bravery and bonding with friends. What is right for one child, may not be right for another.

2. **Plan together.** If you are able to choose which camp, school, place, or person to go to, include your child in the decision making process. Children who feel involved take some responsibility and are generally happier with the outcome.
3. **Talk about expectations.** Discuss with your child why you think the time away will be great and what you think they will enjoy. Allow your child to express their expectations, plus any concerns they may have. Try to focus together on the positive.
4. **Take little steps.** Before your child goes away for any length of time, try to have smaller stints away like a night or two, to slowly gain confidence in their ability to cope. Begin with people who are most familiar to your child eg grandma and gradually to less familiar environments, for example a friend's place.
5. **Find out the procedures.** At the boarding school where I attended, there was a policy in place that new boarders could not call home for the first month. At the time, I found this rule quite distressing and after a week or so, I broke the rule and called home anyway (I don't think anyone found out either). I felt so much better once I had called home and if only I was allowed to ring when I needed to I would have coped much better.

The "no calling home" policy may be effective for some kids, but having the security of knowing they are free to call when needed often provides a more welcoming, homely and secure environment.

If your child is going to camp or any other institutional place, find out if they have such policies in place. Talk to your child about this beforehand so they know what to expect. If they have any concerns about this or feel insecure and upset, request that your child be allowed to call home. Limit it to once a day if necessary.

Often times if kids are told they cannot ring, it is distressing and they will almost break their necks to do it. If they are allowed however, chances are they won't need to.

6. **Check it out.** If possible, go and visit where your child will be going. If your child can visualise where they will be sleeping, playing and eating they will feel more at ease. If you have been there too, they will feel secure knowing that it has your approval and you like the place as well.

7. **Give notice.** If your child does want to go, but is known to get homesick, let people know ahead of time where they are going. The hosts may be more receptive and prepared to give some extra care if the time arises.
8. **Pack together.** Sometimes when kids go away and look into their bag, they get sad or distressed to find that something they wanted is missing. Pack together to ensure you put in their night comforter eg teddy if they have one and any other familiar item they require to feel more at home.

Planning what clothes to pack also provides opportunities to talk about what they need for the fun things they might do. If someone says "Did you bring your joggers?" it is better that they know they did.

9. **Share a pair or something special.** When I went away to school my mum and I split a pair of pink socks. She kept one sock and I kept the other. It symbolised that we each had something that belonged to the other and we would again return together. This can be done with any special items that can be split and shared. The concept can be very comforting to both parent and child.
10. **Be positive.** Make your kids departure cheery to express your confidence in them. Don't promise to come and get them if they're unhappy as that embeds the thought into their mind. It also gives them the impression you have doubts or reservations where they are going. Stay positive and give encouragement.
11. **Write regularly.** Depending on the length of time your child is away, it is important to write regularly so your child knows you're still there and that all is well at home. Focus on the positive in your letters for example the things your child is learning and the friends they're making. Let them know things are fine at home. Tell them that you love them and are also looking forward to seeing them again.
12. **Show a timeframe.** Some kids respond to a visual guide such as a calendar which shows when they will be away, when you will visit, when they will be coming home and any other relevant key events. Having a sense of time may help your child feel more secure. Show them you have the same written down on your calendar too so you can both look forward to those times.

If You Get A Teary Call

Even though you may do everything possible to prepare your child for going away, they may still get quite homesick.

If they call you, acknowledge how they feel. Reassure them by telling them you love them and do miss them too.

Some people recommend to be really upbeat and say how excited you are to hear the great things they're doing. What if they are not telling you anything great that has happened? Clearly they are upset and seeking reassurance from you. Don't pretend you're not hearing them. Kids are very preceptive and know what is going on. They want to know you are hearing how they feel.

Acknowledge what they are saying, tell them it is normal to feel this way at first or for a while and that you too have felt that way before. Remind them of when they will be coming home and how you would love them to be able to enjoy their time there as it is a great chance to have some fun or learn or explore.

Remind them you're confident they can be strong and encourage them to make the most of their time there. Reassure them that you're always there for them.

Try not to jump straight in the car to go and collect them. You may find that they are happy most of the time and generally call when they are having some quiet time like after dinner, nap time and early morning. Give it a little time if they are not distraught as it can take a while for them to get in the groove, make friends and adjust to a new routine.

When To Call It Quits

In some cases, homesickness can be very severe when a child stops functioning properly, like not eating or sleeping over time.

If you or the carer is concerned, go and visit your child. If this helps, visit them again after a short time and gradually increase the duration of time you're away. Always keep them informed of when you will be back.

If visiting doesn't help, I suggest you take them home. You don't ever want to see your child so distraught that they cannot function properly as it will not help them in any way.

Tell them you're proud that they had a go and talk with them about other ways they could try new outings. For example start with smaller steps such as being away just during the day.

The Bottom Line

Homesickness **is** painful but mostly temporary. Usually after a couple of days or weeks things will settle down.

Do listen to your kids, especially if homesickness is prolonged and give them time to talk and express their feelings.

Go with your instincts, no one knows your child like yourself!

How To Prepare Kids For A New Baby

The arrival of a new baby is a time of great excitement to a family but lots of change also occurs.

Parents can become preoccupied with preparations, lack of sleep and adjusting to a new routine. Visitors come to see the new baby and lots of attention is directed their way.

For siblings this can be tough and difficult for them to handle. It is quite natural for them to react in different ways to try to cope.

To help make the transition a little easier for your child, there are some strategies you can use to help them also prepare for the change.

When You Are Pregnant Or Your Partner Is Expecting

It is up to you as parents to decide exactly when to tell your child you are pregnant and how you tell them. This will depend on their age and maturity level.

In all cases though, the more time you give them to get used to the idea the better.

Explain the pregnancy according to your child's maturity level and answer their questions matter-of-factly. If *you* feel comfortable with the subject, so will your child.

A three year old for example doesn't need to know about sex when they ask "How did the baby get in there?" A simple response such as "Mummy and Daddy made the baby together and it is growing inside Mummy's tummy" should satisfy their curiosity.

Explain how your tummy will get bigger as the baby grows and when it will arrive. Young children often can't measure length of time, so it may be easier to describe it relating to an event. For example "Baby will be born when it gets really cold in the winter", "Baby will be born after your next birthday".

Do activities together that can foster your child's interest in a new baby like visiting friends or relatives who have a baby, thinking of baby names together, going back through your child's baby photos, reading age appropriate books about bringing a new baby home, going to look at the scans and listening to the baby's heart beat.

Some hospitals do provide classes for siblings and it is well worth looking in to. They explain how a baby is born, provide opportunities for them to talk about

their feelings, teach them how to hold a baby and many others ways they will be able to help out.

As The Birth Draws Near

Work out what plans you want to make for when you are going in to labour and spending time in hospital once the baby is born. Discuss these plans with your child so they know what to expect and feel comfortable with the arrangements.

Try to include your child in as many activities as possible once the baby is born. If possible, arrange for your child to visit you with the new baby before other visitors. This will help them feel included as a close unit and allow you some intimate time together as a family. It is nice for the child to be able to show the new baby off to grandparents and other visitors and will help them feel significant in the immediate family.

Try to keep your child's regular routine as normal and familiar as possible so they don't feel as though the new baby has created an upheaval to their life. That is, if you need to move them into a new room, do it *well before* the baby is due or *well after* the baby has been brought home. The same applies for changing them from a cot to a bed, potty training and any other new challenges they should attempt.

Once Your Baby Is Home

Try to include your child in as many daily activities with the new baby as possible. This will help your child feel important, needed and not left out.

Be prepared that your child's help may slow things down a fair bit but it is well worth the effort. They can help to pass you the nappy cream, talk to the baby while you are changing them or playing, help push the pram and bring up burps.

Give them praise for their efforts, tell them how good they are with the baby and that the baby must really love their help.

If your child is not at all interested in the baby, still ask them if they want to help but if they don't, accept it and don't force it. They may take some time to warm to the idea or simply be preoccupied with their own activities.

Sometimes your child may not be able to help out so much or you need some quiet time with the baby to breastfeed or settle them. Have activities organised for your child that they enjoy and where you know they are safe. Consider settled activities such as watching their favourite show, playing with their favourite toys, reading or colouring.

Try really hard to spend some one-on-one time with your child. If they get some quality time with you too each day, they may not feel so put out by the new baby. This may be playing a game together, talking or throwing a ball. Give them some undivided special time.

When relatives and friends come to see the new baby let your child help to show them the baby and tell the relatives how the baby is coming along. Also initiate some conversation with the visitor that is not about the new baby. For example how your other child has been trying really hard at soccer or other things they have been doing. This will also hint to your visitors to remember to include your other child along with the excitement of the new baby.

If Your Child Starts To Misbehave

Children are extremely perceptive and will often articulate their feelings with their behaviours.

If your child starts to misbehave, talk in a babyish way, whine or act in a resentful way they may be struggling to adjust to the changes.

Often this kind of behaviour is an act to seek more attention. In any case, changes in behaviour need to be approached in a sensitive way.

Do not accept undesirable behaviour or drop your standards. Let your child know that how they feel is very important to you but they must express it to you in an appropriate way.

Your child may be looking for more quality time with you. If help is available to you or if your partner can give you some relief with the baby, perhaps they could mind the baby so you can spend that special time with your child.

Initiate conversations with your child to help them tell you how they are feeling about the new baby.

Reassure them that they are and always will be very much loved and important to you and can tell you how they are feeling at any time.

How To Teach Your Kids About Tolerance

In our societies today we simply cannot deny that we are surrounded by differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, disabilities and other differences.

Some people love to be surrounded by a multicultural society while others do not feel at ease. This mostly depends on our own exposure and attitudes towards our interaction with different people.

Why encourage tolerance in our kids? To start with, we want our kids to feel relaxed and open to learning from different cultures. They bring new ideas, experiences and energy to our lives. Our kids can potentially learn bundles from other cultures. If willing, tolerance opens doors in business, education, travel, leisure, lifestyle, art plus other areas of life.

To help our kids have a successful future, they need to be able to work with others. They need to not be afraid, to step outside their comfort zone and to understand, learn, respect and appreciate others.

Tolerance is not about accepting bad behaviour, but accepting "people" for who they are and treating those how "you" wish to be treated. Remind your kids of this consistently.

Being tolerant of differences doesn't mean sacrificing your own heritage or beliefs. We can be proud and stand by those beliefs 100% while continuing to celebrate the differences of others.

The tolerance level that parents possess naturally teaches their kids the same message. Children closely watch and imitate us, even before they can speak. Kids will mirror the values and attitudes of those they love and look up to.

Parents who model and display tolerance in their every day actions and words teach their kids to appreciate differences in others too. So we teach by example and provide them with opportunities to play and work with others.

Kids can't "just" be told, they need to experience first hand how people who are different and similar to themselves can contribute in numerous ways.

Here are some tips for how to teach your kids tolerance.

- Look at the way you treat and speak to others. Does this reflect tolerance? Demonstrate a respect for others and reflect on your own attitude regularly.

- Kids listen and learn from you. At school, I have often overheard kids stereotyping and joking about the slang names given to different groups. When asked about those words they mostly tell me that is what they have heard used at home.

Even if you're having a conversation with your partner, be mindful that your kids may be listening. Think carefully about the words you use. By all means talk about differing groups in a factual and informative manner, but avoid joking and any degrading name-calling.

Your kids may repeat what they have heard and sometimes in less private situations.

- Answer your kid's questions honestly and respectfully. Everyone notices differences in people so it is perfectly okay to discuss them with your kids if done in a respectful way.
- Choose programs, movies, stories and games that value differences. The media has a powerful ability to shape attitudes. If you do watch or see something that is prejudice, be sure to talk about it with your kids and the hurt it can cause to those groups.
- Expect your kids to treat others with respect. By modelling tolerance yourself, you should certainly not accept disrespectful behaviour both inside and outside your home.
- Value the differences within your own family. Accept the qualities each member possesses regardless of differing styles, interests and abilities. Help your kids feel values for who they are too.
- Foster self-esteem in your family. We all know that people who don't respect others rarely feel happy and secure within themselves. Kids who do feel good about themselves tend to be more courteous towards others.
- Involve your kids in situations where diversity is present. This may be at sport, school, day care and camps.
- Learn together about other cultures and traditions. Explore how different cultures celebrate occasions in their own special way and go about life. Talk about it and appreciate the experience.
- Teach your own family traditions to your kids and encourage pride. Value and talk about where you belong and be open to teach others what you have to offer.

Think about the behaviours you wish to see in your child. Then model those behaviours, because kids will mostly follow in your footsteps.

Summary

I hope you have found my information useful. It is now time to put these tips to practice and feel confident talking with your kids about sensitive issues. Do not hesitate to dig deeper and look for even more information to help your explanations.

There are lots of people you can talk to for more help like doctors, teachers, members of the clergy, teachers and other parents.

Lastly, enjoy your kids! They are not young for long and before we know it they may have families of their own. Keep this poem somewhere safe and read it often.

If I had my child to raise over again - Anonymous

If I had my child to raise over again,
I would finger paint more and point the finger less.
I'd do less correcting and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch and watch with my eyes.
I would care to know less and know to care more.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites
I'd stop playing serious and seriously play.
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do more hugging and less tugging.
I'd build self esteem first and the house later.
I'd teach less about the love of power
and more about the power of love.

Bonus Report 1 - How to Talk to Kids About Money

It is a very wise idea to start educating your kids about money when they are young. Of course we don't want to deprive them of anything, yet at the same time we want them to learn the value of money.

Many kids see money go in and out of their parents wallet and most don't know how it got there nor how quickly it can disappear.

Teaching your kids the value of money from an early age will only contribute to their success later in life.

Benefits of teaching your kids about money when they are young are that they will soon learn how quickly it disappears when it is wasted on non-essential items, how to spend and save it wisely, understand the habits of wealth and help them to make better choices in life.

If you are an extravagant shopper yourself or are wasteful with money, it does not set a good example to your kids on how to manage money. You cannot complain when they are in their teens or adult life if they keep finding themselves in financial difficulty if you have not taught them well.

It is not up to our teachers in schools to teach kids all about money and how to manage it. The responsibility lies with the parents or the minders of kids!

Ways to teach your kids the concepts and vocabulary about money are:

- Always provide your kids with the essentials to cater for their needs. Then give them an allowance for a week or month (week for a younger child, month for older children) and allow them to budget and decide how they spend their allowance over the period.
- Provide opportunities for your kids to earn money for their savings. Encourage them to work for it so they see that effort is needed to create wealth and that you have to *earn* money. From a young age, offer payment for "extra" work around the house and yard. For teens, encourage part-time or some holiday work.
- Teach your kids to break down their finances into categories or pools for which they contribute for different purposes. Establish a saving system with your child with some short term and long term savings. eg: \$2 set aside for

charitable contributions/church, \$2 investing (stocks, bonds, mutual funds), \$2 savings for a short term goal like a toy, \$2 savings for a long term goal like a swimming pool or college fund, \$10 spending on incidentals like the canteen. Make sure they have a piggy bank and savings accounts.

- Show your kids a family bill, for example an electricity bill. Set a task to see if you could work together for a month to cut back the bill from the previous month. Make more effort to turn lights and television off when not in the room. There will be great anticipation to see the next bill. Show them how money compounds and grows.
- Teach about money in everyday activities, for example when a child breaks a toy they bought themselves, they realise the true value of money if they wish to replace it.
- Play money games such as "Monopoly" to help learn money terms and vocabulary.
- Learning not to spend their savings wastefully will be an important lesson.
- Kids will feel proud and enthused by their own efforts to save. Offer praise, encouragement and congratulate them.
- If kids really want something big and exciting (that is costly too) for example a trip to the theme park, new plasma TV, or swimming pool, set up a fund for which the whole family can contribute. A jar in a secure place to put spare coins in may work well.

Regularly track the savings to spur on the enthusiasm. Work together and set goals as a family to earn the funds and feel the sense of pride once it is achieved. Kids will learn the responsibility, perseverance and hard work required to buy such luxuries.

By using some of the above strategies, kids will see the benefits of investing and saving. Teaching them to not always expect money from others will help their relationships throughout life. We are teaching them that they too need to take responsibility if they are to cater for their needs and wants.

Bonus Report 2 - Helping Kids Cope With Moving

Kids thrive on familiarity and routines, so to learn that they are moving can be traumatic. Whether your decision to move is optional or not, some kids may have trouble understanding it, especially if they were not involved in the decision making process.

Discussion Tips For All Kids

- Prepare your kids by informing them early about the move. Give them time to get used to the idea if possible. Talk about the move often to reinforce that it is real and going to happen.
- Kids immediate reaction can be fear for the unknown. Try to give them plenty of information about the move and encourage any questions. Answer them honestly and be prepared for a variety of reactions.
- If you're moving nearby, take your kids to see the new destination. Allow them to do some exploring. Being able to visualise where they are going help to relieve any anxiety.
- Try to involve your kids in the move as much as possible so they feel they are contributing and being a good help. Encourage their opinions and participation. For example you may get them to help cut out some real estate ads from the paper to help find a house in their new town.
- If moving far away, try to collate as much information and images of the new destination to show your kids – of the town/city, house, school. Find out what facilities and activities they can be involved in.

Easing The Transition For Young Kids (Babies, Toddlers & Preschoolers)

Your support and guidance is crucial, even though kids under five years old generally do not understand what kind of changes are about to occur. This age bracket is deemed to be the easiest when moving.

Ways you can help young children are:

1. Use books and stories to show what moving is and explain to them what will be happening. Eg furniture, toys and clothes will all be packed up and moved out.
2. Keep explanations simple and precise.
3. While packing up their things, explain what you are doing and that their toys are not being thrown out or taken away for long.

4. If not moving too far away, unpack a few toys and belongings in the new destination so they can understand where their things are going.
5. Try to keep some of your kid's familiar items like their bedroom furniture, until they have settled into their new home. Make changes slowly.
6. If preferred, ask someone to mind your toddler or come with you to help take care of them on the days you are moving. Not only is it safer, you can move about much faster and get it done quickly!

Easing The Transition For School Age Children

Elementary or middle aged school children are generally fairly open to a move and can be excited. Involve them as much as possible in the move. Give them some responsibilities like packing some items so they feel needed and helpful.

At this age, one of their biggest concerns is associated with the new school they will move to. Regardless of what time of the year you move, there may still be some nerves and reservations for your kids. To them it means a new routine, new friends, new teachers plus much more.

To help the transition run smoothly to the new school, try to collect as much information, resources and documentation needed by the new school to avoid any stress causing glitches. This may mean providing some school reports, work books from the previous school, tests they have done and medical records.

Easing The Transition For Teens

Teens are a little more susceptible to taking a move badly. It is mostly associated with their closeness of friends and social group. They may be in a relationship or have been long awaiting a special event like an excursion, prom, or concert that they will consequently miss out on. It is common for teens to respond with more rebellion to a move.

If the move will disrupt important schooling exams, you might consider allowing your teen to remain there with a reliable family/friend or relative until the timing is less concerning.

Assure your teen that you too will be endeavouring to stay in close contact with your friends and family and talk about when you may be able to return to visit them. Explain to them that moving on is a part of life and that they too will experience making these decisions later in life like moving to college, a new job, and travelling.

Once You Have Moved

Try to get your kids back in to familiar routines and their rooms unpacked as soon as possible, for example mealtimes, bedtimes and play times. The familiarity will help them settle and feel more secure.

Go with your child to their new school and meet the principal and teachers. Ask their teacher to contact you if they have any questions or concerns about your child. If you don't hear anything, check back in with their teacher after about six weeks to see how they are settling in.

A move can be challenging at times, but if you focus on working through the process together as a family it can bring you closer. Moving out of your comfort zones can help you learn a lot more about each other.

Bonus Report 3 – **20 Ways To Talk So Your Kids Will Listen**

The WAY we talk to our kids has a huge impact on their **learning** and ability to **listen** to us.

We are constantly modelling to our kids how to act and behave and the way we talk to them fits right into this category. The way we speak to them and those around us is showing them how we want them to speak back to us.

I have found that there are generally three different ways that parents communicate with their kids. The first one is in an aggressive way. These parents yell a lot, put their kids down and use attacking words. Their children respond in many different ways, mainly by playing up a lot more, feeling fearful, yelling back and ignoring their parents' constant orders.

The second form of communication commonly seen is a passive form. These parents mutter soft, cautious words and tones to their kids finding that they run riot and walk all over them. Unfortunately these parents are so passive that sometimes when they are pushed to their limits, they suddenly turn their communication into an aggressive tone.

Lastly the third way that parents can communicate with their kids is in an assertive way. This is what I have found to be by far the most effective way to communicate with kids at all levels. An assertive way of communicating is firm, consistent, clear, positive, warm and confident. Communicating with kids in an assertive way is a real skill yet it shows your kids that mum and dad know what they're going on about and to listen.

Here are my 20 top tips for improving the WAY we talk to our kids:

1. **Use your child's name**. Your own name is music to your ears. Our kids are no different, plus it helps to get their attention before delivering your message. eg "George, please go and get.....". Young children can often only concentrate on one thing at a time. Call your child's name until you have their attention before you speak. Eg "Helen". (Wait until she stops kicking the ball and looks at you.) "Lunch will be ready in ten minutes".
2. **Use positive language** – try not to be saying "no" or "don't" all of the time. There is no doubt that if we say "Don't drop that glass" or "No running inside" or "Don't drag your coat in the dirt" your child has that image and thought imbedded in their mind and more times than not, they will drop the glass!

Instead, try to word what you want them to do. Eg "Only walking inside please" or "Hold onto that glass, it is a special one" or "Hold the coat up so it doesn't drag". This requires much thought and practice but is well worth the effort.

Try to eliminate words you use that may be ridiculing ("You're being a big baby."), name-calling ("You're a really bad boy."), and shaming ("I was so ashamed of you today"). This type of language achieves very little except leaving your child feeling worthless. Kids will often cut off communication with those who use these words with them and begin to develop a poor self-concept.

Positive and kind words give your child more confidence, makes them feel happier, helps them behave better, encourages them to try hard and achieve success. They learn to imitate you and deliver the same respect and praise to others.

Examples of positive words are: "I like to way you remembered to pack up your toys", "Thank you for helping me clean up this mess", "You tried so hard to share your things with your sister, it made me feel really happy".

3. **Connect with your child** with eye contact. You may need to get down to their level or sit at the table with them. When you are chatting with your kids, this shows them also what they should do. Not only is it good manners, it helps you to listen to each other.

Say your child's name until you get their eye contact, especially before giving them a direction. It is important that they give you their attention, and you should model the same behaviour for them.

4. **Use volume appropriately** – When in the classroom teaching, I used to have a class next door to me whose teacher always yelled. The kids used to put in their earplugs and eventually stopped listening at all. The teacher was always trying to yell over the noise of the kids, what a nightmare!

The same applies for at home, don't ever compete with a yelling child. When they have calmed down, then talk. If you use the volume of your voice appropriately for the majority of the time, raising your voice in an urgent situation should not be ignored. They will sit up and take notice because it doesn't happen all of the time.

Yelling orders or directions from another room may also fall on deaf ears after a while, for example yelling "Turn off the TV now please Chad" or "Hurry up and get dressed" from the kitchen gives the impression that you're busy and not too serious.

Walking into the room, joining in for a minute or two and waiting for the commercial break will go down with far more cooperation. You are modelling respectful behaviour to start with and you have come to them with your direction, so they know you mean it!

5. **Suggest options and alternatives** – When you want your kids to cooperate with you, it is far easier if they can understand why they need them to do something and how it is to their advantage to do so. They need to see the importance of following your directions.

For example, "When you get dressed, you may go outside with Daddy", "Which jumper would you like to put on, the red one or the blue one?", "When you do your homework, you can then watch tv", "Which book would you like to read, this one or that one?" "When you are dressed for school, you may then play with your toys".

By adopting words like "when" and "which" makes the child feel as though they have choices, even though there is no room for negotiation. This works far better than using "if" words.

Also, try to include your child in helping you solve a problem. For example, instead of saying "Don't leave your toy trucks out there", try saying "George, think about where you should store your toy trucks so they're in a safe place, come and tell me when you've decided on a good spot."

Try to offer alternatives rather than saying a straight out "no" or "don't". For example "You can't get the paints out just now, but you could draw with the crayons instead".

6. **Keep it simple** – Young kids have trouble following too many directions given at once. We can probably relate to that when we ask someone for directions to a destination and are bombarded with instructions we later forget.

Try to stagger your requests into small blocks. Eg instead of saying, "Helen, go and pack up your toys, but first put your dirty shoes outside and then feed the cat". Chances are, Helen will feed the cat then go outside to play because feeding the cat is the last thing she remembers you asking.

Even though we want to improve our communication with our kids, be preceptive to their level of interest in the conversation. If they are getting the blank stare, call it quits. If you feel as though you're waffling on, try to use a more direct approach next time you visit the subject.

7. **Keep away from nagging** – At the end of each school day, I wanted the children in my class to tidy the room before home time. I felt that they should learn to tidy up after themselves and take pride in their room. I knew that if I went around asking each child to pick up their rubbish, wipe their desks, empty the rubbish bins, and clean the sink nothing would get done.

So I created a job chart. Each job had a child's name next to it and I showed it to them at the start of each week. I would rotate the jobs weekly to avoid monotony. I explained that five minutes before home time each day it would be "job time". Just before the bell, I would walk around the room and pick which job or jobs were completed to perfection. That child or children would receive a bonus or prize. My room was immaculate each day and I hardly had to say a thing!

This can work well at home too. Either writing things down or having a chart with incentives in place, eliminate lots of nagging. It is important to make sure you recognise and praise effort, and reward desired behaviour.

Try to set a time where kids know what is expected. They thrive on routines. For example, set a time to do their chores in the afternoons. When they are playing they don't like to be interrupted, just as much as we don't when reading a good book. If they know *what* is expected and *when* you shouldn't have to nag all of the time.

8. **Model and expect good manners** – Good manners at home or anywhere shouldn't be optional. If you model good manners to your children and everyone else, they will see that good manners is expected and displayed on a consistent level. Start teaching your children to say the basics like "please" and "thank you" before they can talk.

Children deserve the common courtesy of manners that adults use with each other. They will often imitate the speech and behaviour of their parents and carers. Say "please", "thank you" and "you're welcome" to your kids as you would anyone else.

9. **Be gentle but firm** – if you have made your decision about something, stick to it. Make sure you and your partner agree on the issue and stay united on your decision.

Your kids may not like the decision at the time, but they will know it stands firm and won't bother persisting with either of you or playing one parent off against the other.

Make your requests important and speak as though you mean it. Requesting made in a wishy-washy tone gives kids the impression you are not that concerned whether they follow your request or not.

10. **Ask open-ended questions** - If you want to get your kids to think more and open their minds, you need to ask them open-ended questions. That is, questions that are not answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer. They are invitations to say more, and share their ideas and feelings.

For example, instead of asking "Did you enjoy Peter's party today?" you could ask "What was the best part of Peter's party today?"

Respond to their ideas to show them you are interested in what they have to say and that they are important to you eg "Really?", "I understand." "What about..." "That is interesting".

11. **Check for understanding** – if you find that your child is not responding to your requests or getting confused by your instructions or conversations, remember to check for their understanding before moving on to the next topic.

Ask them to repeat what you have said. If they can't, you know that it is too long or complicated for them to understand. Try to rephrase your choice of words with shorter and simpler sentences.

12. **Explain what you want with "I" messages** – When asking your child to do something, you will receive a greater response by explaining what you want in terms of thoughts and feelings by sending "I messages". This is far more effective than using orders or sending "you messages".

It lets your child know how their behaviour makes you feel. Kids sometimes don't consider how their behaviour will affect others. By using this strategy, it may help them give more consideration to their actions and it gives them more responsibility to change their behaviour.

For example "I would like you to come over here please" instead of "Come over here" or "I would like you to give Oliver a turn please" instead of "Give Oliver a turn!" It is a softer approach and children who are willing to please will respond to this type of language.

Explaining how you feel also helps kids to see why they should comply. For example "When you run away from mummy in the store I feel worried because you could get lost". Use "when you.... I feel....because...." words.

13. **Give notice** – If your child is fully engrossed with something or an activity and it is time to move on or leave. Give them some advance warning so they get used to the idea. For example "George, it is nearly time to go. Start saying good-bye to the puppy please".

14. **Use enquiry-based listening** – Show your kids that they have your full attention and you care enough to listen to them. Reading the paper, vacuuming and working on the computer are too distracting to give your kids your full attention.

If you really cannot talk at that point, don't pretend to be listening. Promise them a time when you can listen and be sure to follow through.

Show that you are interested in what they have to say by using enquiry based listening. This is when you respond to them with words that encourage more conversation. For example "Sounds like you're saying....." Or "How did that make you feel?" or "Do you mean.....?"

15. **Make time for one-on-one conversations** – This is especially important if there is quite an age gap between your kids. Sometimes older siblings talk over the top of the younger ones, and sometimes the younger ones just prefer to let the older siblings do all the talking.

Conversations with older siblings can sometimes be over and above the younger kids level of communication. Plus older siblings require stimulating conversations where they can learn and enquire for more information.

Therefore, try to get some one-to-one time with your siblings alone at different times so you can really talk at their level and use appropriate vocabulary. It might just be while walking to the park, reading a book together before bed, or driving to get an ice cream. It doesn't have to be structured time, but make quality use of opportunities as they arise.

16. **Don't sweat the small stuff**. By all means, enforce your serious rules firmly, but try not to sweat the small stuff. Often times kids will tune out from listening to their parents if they tend to lecture over little things a lot.

For example, telling your child what they "ought" to be doing all the time will eventually fall on deaf ears. They are not thinking for themselves what they ought to be doing because they are always being told.

For example, instead of saying, "You must listen to your teacher at school, or else you won't understand". Try to use an approach where they can think for themselves what they should do. Use enquiry based questioning

such as "What do you find hard to understand at school? Why do you think you find this difficult? What could you do in class to learn more from your teacher?"

With this approach you are able to have a more connected discussion where the child has to think of a resolution and strategy for improving their behaviour or problem. When you do need to enforce a more serious rule that is not negotiable, your kids are more likely to listen.

17. **Be considerate.** Think about the way that you talk to your friends. Then think about the way you speak to your kids. Is it with the same consideration and tone? More wonderful relationships with kids would develop if adults gave as much thought and consideration talking to their kids as they do when talking to their friends.
18. **Show acceptance.** When you show your kids that you accept and love them just the way they are despite their differences, they will be more likely to share their feelings and problems with you. They will know that as they grow and change, you will be there for them no matter what.

We do not have to accept inappropriate behaviour such as violence or teasing. We can however accept and love our kids as they are by their character, personality and individual interests.

For example: Oliver says "Mum, I am feeling scared to go to bed". A response to *encourage* more communication would be:

"That's okay Oliver. I will leave the door open and turn on your night light. I will pop in later to check on you".

A *poor* response would be:

"Don't be a big cry baby Oliver. You're old enough to know better than that. Only baby boys get scared!"

19. **Don't interrupt.** Try not to interrupt or scold your kids when they are telling you a story. Kids will lose interest in sharing their feelings with you if you shift away from their story and use the time to teach them a lesson.

For example, Henry came home really excited from Sally's place and started to tell his mother all about the great time he had playing down by the dam. His mother rudely interrupted his story and began to lecture him on the dangers of playing around water. Henry didn't finish his story and thought twice about sharing his experiences with his mother the next time.

Henry's mother certainly should remind him of the rule about playing near water and ensuring there is an adult present, but at another time or at least when he has finished his story.

20. **Make conversation a priority with your kids.** Open and comfortable communication with your kids develops confidence, self-esteem, good relationships with others, cooperation and warm relationships with you. Take the time and effort to foster your relationship and communication skills by talking with your kids as much as you can.

Remember that talking *with* kids is a two way street. Talk with them and then hear what they have to say. Listening is just as important as talking.

Bonus Report 4 –
How To Talk To Kids About The Death Of A Pet

There is no doubt that pets can teach our kids so much about life. They can bring much joy and also much heartbreak.

Death is inevitable for all living things and is a part of life we must learn to accept. Having pets can help kids learn more about this concept and how to cope.

Pets are often considered a part of the family and are a companion kids turn to in a time of need. Helping kids learn to deal with the loss of a pet will help them learn to deal with other losses throughout life.

Breaking the news to your kids can be tough. You should choose a quiet time, free from distractions when they're in a familiar place.

Adapt your language and details according to your child's age and maturity level. Be guided by their questions as to the degree of information you give.

Discussion Tips:

- If your pet is old or ill, talk about the possibilities of your pet dying in the near future. Prepare them for what may soon happen, but encourage them to enjoy time with their pet while they are still here.
- If your pet has to be "put down", explain that your pet was never going to recover, it is the kindest way to stop the pet's pain, that the vet has done all they can to help and that the pet will die without feeling any hurt.

Explain that your pet will soon be at peace. Try not to say that the pet will be "put to sleep". This can confuse young children and they may fear going "to sleep" at night themselves in case the same thing happens to them!

- If kids request details of the euthanasia process, explain that the vet will give it a needle that will firstly put the pet to sleep, which will then stop its heart from beating.
- If children are emotionally mature, they may wish to be with the pet when it dies. It is fair to let them if they wish, but only you can judge whether your child will be able to cope with this.
- If a pet's death is more sudden, tell your kids truthfully and calmly what happened. Details do not need to be in-depth however be guided by their questions.

- Never say that the pet has run away, been taken or tell some kind of lie. It gives the kids a false hope of the pet returning again, plus they may resent you if they found out you have lied to them.
- Try to explain the concept of 'dog years' and how they are much shorter than 'human years'.
- Bury your pet with a special ceremony to help finalise the dying process. Allow your kids to plan this and what they may like to include in the burial.

For example, they may wish to bury the pet with its favourite toy or a goodbye letter they have written. They may like to plant a special tree in their pet's favourite spot in the garden. This will help them with the grieving process.

At the burial, take the time to share some fun times and experiences they have had with the pet, fond moments and even create a scrapbook in memory of the pet.

- Create a unique memorial for your pet in your home. Your kids could draw pictures to hang, write about the wonderful experiences they have had together and display their favourite photo of their pet.
- Some books are available to read with your kids about dealing with the loss of a pet. Ask your librarian or bookstore for an age appropriate book to read together. This can sometimes help kids to open up and talk about how they are feeling.
- Be there to talk to your kids and let them know it is natural to feel all sorts of emotions when something special dies.
- Express your feelings and emotions about the death too. It shows your kids that it is okay to talk about the death and that you feel the loss as well.
- Share stories about when you were young and some of the special pets you had, and lost. Explain how you found it hard to say good-bye to them also, but as time passed by the pain decreased.
- Give your kids as much affection and comfort they desire.
- Talk about your pet often and with love. Always remember the happy memories together.

- As you notice the pain starting to go away and the shock has faded, it might be time to move on. Consider getting a new pet to add to your family.

While you would never want to replace your last pet, you may wish to welcome another animal in to your lives to love and enjoy.