

TALK, TALK, TALK . . .

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS

There aren't exact formulas for talk between parents and children because all children aren't alike and neither are their parents. This article will provide you with some hints on how to encourage children to talk when they don't talk enough or how to redirect them when they talk too much. Finally, I'll share with you some clues that will help you cope with your arguers.

CHILDREN WHO DON'T TALK ENOUGH

Your children are more likely to talk to you if you allow time in your busy day for conversation. Making time after your evening meal or right before bedtime is quite effective. A snack to accompany the conversation often helps. When you consider that children rarely like to go to bed, their motivation to stay awake with you may indeed encourage their conversation. Model conversation by sharing your daily and childhood experiences and feelings, but don't talk too much, or it will leave little time for your children's input.

***Referential speaking is
a very powerful means of
communication.***

Shy children are often discouraged from talking because of *referential speaking*. Referential speaking is a term I created to describe comments made among adults with reference to children within the children's hearing. It is a very powerful means of communication. The children may not even be within their parents' view, but if they are within earshot, what those adults say may have dramatic positive or negative impact. Remember when you'd listen in on conversations between Mom and Grandma about you? Referential speaking may actually limit children's feelings of personal control and can cause shy children to think they're unable to do anything about their shyness.



Positive referential speaking is equally powerful and can encourage your children dramatically. Try saying to your spouse or another adult that your son or daughter seems to be overcoming shyness or growing in social skills or responsibility. Even if you whisper these messages to each other, your child is likely to hear them and act almost immediately on your new, more favorable impressions.

Referential speaking is a dramatic tool, and I only ask that you use it sincerely and carefully. Here's an interesting case example:

Parents came to my clinic recently asking for suggestions on how to deal with a somewhat aggressive and very competitive first-grade girl. As I shared suggestions with them, they reminded me that when they had first come to see me about their daughter who was three at the time, they had been concerned about her shyness. I had advised them then about the use of referential speaking to encourage her assertiveness. Obviously, it has been more than effective. Perhaps they'll have to referentially call her shy or quiet again; that is, if they are fortunate enough to discover her in the act of being a little quieter.

If you'd like your children to communicate more, be sure to discuss their improvements and not their shyness around others. They will hear and gradually live up to your new and more positive expectations.

CHILDREN WHO TALK TOO MUCH

Highly verbal children can be a delight, but, yes, their constant chatter can be tiresome. Undoubtedly, you may even know adults who you wish would withhold some conversation.



Children's too-verbal patterns originate in early childhood when their precocious, grown-up sounding vocabulary and reasoning attract adult attention, praise, and astonishment. The more the adults encourage, the more these verbal children talk. Actually, praise is very helpful for the development of their vocabulary and verbal expression. However, children who automatically draw so much attention to their oral communication may become addicted to that attention and internalize a connection between being smart and talking.

***. . . when they are talking, they
feel smarter.***

Many verbally precocious children accidentally get into the habit of talking too much. Actually, their talking becomes very powerful, and they may unconsciously draw attention to themselves by overdoing it. Furthermore, they prefer talking to listening because when they're talking, they feel smarter. As they get older, their continuous talking is usually less appreciated. However, it's probably difficult for them to feel good about themselves unless they're verbalizing. They don't feel as smart when they're listening. Their teachers may not understand this underlying

pressure, but whether they do or not, it becomes an annoyance to both them and other students.

***Help your children channel
their chatter sensitively, creatively,
and constructively.***

Choose some interests you may share with your verbal children which will engage their activity and energy. Hiking, biking, or board games and card games will provide attention and will limit (but not eliminate) talk. Help your children channel their chatter sensitively, creatively, and constructively. Encourage them to write stories, journals, letters, and poetry. Verbal children may thrive on writing and can thus express themselves creatively and expressively without being invasive. If the writing itself feels cumbersome to your children, suggest they dictate their stories and ideas into a tape recorder.



You can also explain to your children the value of using their intelligence by suggesting ways to channel their discussions appropriately so that they can continue to feel good about their thinking. Debate, forensics, political science clubs, drama, and student government are usually excellent extracurricular avenues for highly verbal students. You can thus successfully encourage their expression while helping them to be better received by their many audiences.

CHILDREN WHO ARGUE

Here is some help for you if you feel trapped by your children who seem to argue constantly. Don't feel obligated to *convince* your children to accept your reasons. That's where the arguing and power struggles cause problems. Your efforts to convince them that you are right are completely nonproductive because they want to win. After you have taken their ideas into consideration, your final decision should prevail. If you feel obligated to convince them of your case, your continued reasoning is likely to evolve into an irrational power struggle. Following is the Anti-Arguing Routine, adapted from my book *How To Parent So Children Will Learn**, to guide you:

- When arguers come at you (they always choose an inconvenient time because they instinctively know you're vulnerable), remind yourself *not* to say yes or no immediately. Instead, after they've made their request, ask them for their reasons. If you've asked for their reasons, they can never accuse you of not listening. Also, you don't really want to cut off their thoughts and opinions.

- After you've heard their reasons, say, "Let me think about it. I'll get back to you in a few minutes (or after dinner for a small request; later for a larger one)." There are three marvelous benefits to this step of the arguing process: First, it permits you to continue to be rational (that's what you wanted to be when you accidentally trained your arguers); second, it teaches children to be patient; and third, because arguers are often bright, manipulative children, they know that since you haven't yet responded with either a yes or no, their good behavior increases the likelihood of your saying yes. Therefore, while you're taking time to be rational, and while they're learning patience, your children will be on their best behavior. How nice!
- Then think about their request and their reasons. Don't be negatively biased by their pushiness. If your answer is yes, smile and be positive and enthusiastic. Arguers rarely see adults smile.
- If your answer is no, say no firmly. Include your reason as part of your refusal. Don't change your decision, and don't engage in further discussion. Don't let them make you feel guilty. It is healthy for children to learn to accept noes.
- If they continue to debate, remind them calmly that you've heard their request and their reasons, you've taken time to think about them, you've given them your answer and your reasons, and the discussion is now over.
- If they continue to argue, and they're below age ten and not too big, escort them to their rooms for a time-out. If they're too big for you to time them out, go calmly and assertively to your own room and lock your door. If they beat on your door and use words you never believed they had in their vocabulary, ignore them. Relax with a good book. Calmly remind yourself that you are in control and they are not. Finally, they'll learn that parents have earned the privilege of saying no. Your children should also have the



opportunity to remain children. They may not appreciate the latter at the time of the argument; however, your home will become a more pleasant place in which to live, and they will come to

*** *How to Parent so Children Will Learn (Scottsdale, AR: Great Potential Press, Inc, 2008) To Order, [Click Here](#)***

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