



# Conversation Starters - Grades 4 and Up

## Starting Tips

Remember, when talking to your child it's important to use questions beginning with who, what, where, and how, with fewer why questions.

Once you have asked your children some of the questions listed below, make sure your children know that you heard them by repeating what you heard back or paraphrasing their perspective. Then you can share your own observations and if the opportunity presents, share your perspective/knowledge. The older your child is, the more important this sequence is. Don't try to shove anything through the drive-through window when it's not open, or even closing. :-)

Instead of asking, "How are you?" Try variations on these instead:

- o How safe do you feel at school, at home, and in the world?
- o What's the most challenging thing you're dealing with right now?
- o What helps you feel better when you're worried or stressed out?
- o What is the best and worst thing about being a teenager?
- o What's your biggest fear when you're at school?
- o What's one thing you really like about yourself right now?

Be prepared to answer the same questions since a conversation can often lead to discovery on both sides.

## General Conversation:

When you're together with your child and you see or hear things that can be discussed, ask them some of the following questions that encourage critical thinking:

- o What's your opinion?
- o What do you think about that?
- o What influences a person to ie) dress that way?
- o What message do you think they're sending?
- o Do you think I send a message by what I wear?
- o How about you?
- o How about your friends? Have they told you anything about this?
- o Do you think your friends are going through this too?
- o Is there anything you want to ask me about this?

Or when listening to music ask some of the following questions:

- o What message do you think those lyrics are sending?
- o What do you think the motive is behind them?

Other thought-provoking questions:

- o What tests/challenges do you think a relationship needs to go through in order to build solid trust? Which of your friends do you trust the most? What is it about them that helps you trust them?



- o What have you seen lately that made you feel uncomfortable?
- o What can you do when someone shows you something that makes you really uncomfortable?
- o Do you think it's about age or readiness when considering when a person is ready to start dating? Why?
- o What do you think makes misusing alcohol or drugs so attractive to teens today? Under what circumstances might you feel pressured to join in?
- o What can you see yourself doing if someone sends you a "sext" (a picture of someone partly dressed or completely undressed)?
- o What would motivate a person to send a nude image/message of themselves when they know they can never get that image back?

### **Checking up on your relationship:**

- o Is there anything in our relationship that would make you hesitate coming to me if you were in trouble?
- o What could I do to help you trust me more?
- o Do you know that if you're ever in a bad situation and you need to avoid sexual or substance abuse, you can always call me? (Assure your teen that if they ever need an excuse to avoid sexual or substance pressure that they can use you as an excuse and call you ANYTIME to come and get them.)
- o Why do you think I care so much about you knowing your value?
- o I hope you know that if you're ever confused or unsure about something, I'm here for you so that you can avoid possible embarrassment with your friends right? And if I don't know the answer, I'll find it out for you. (Let them know that if they are confused or unsure about something, that you are there for them that they can often avoid embarrassment with their friends by coming to you first; and if you don't know the answer, you'll find it out for them.)

### **Questions to help your child envision their future:**

- o If you could model your lifelong relationship after someone else's, whose would it be and why?
- o What are some of the characteristics you're looking for in a life partner? How do you think these may change as you get older? (Share with them the kind of future relationships you want for them including things like respect, freedom to disagree, thoughtfulness, honesty, loyalty etc.)
- o What do you think some of our family values are? How different are they from other families you've been around? Which ones will you pass on to your children and which ones will be different? How come?
- o What do people say are the pros and cons of having sex before marriage? Write out in columns.
- o What do people say are the pros & cons of waiting for marriage? Write out in a column
- o Do these pros for sex before have short or long term effects? Do these cons for sex before have short or long term effects?



- o Do these pros for sex only after marriage have short or long term effects? Do these cons for sex only after marriage have short or long term effects?

## **Questions to help you check out how the other influencers in your child's life are affecting them:**

### **Media Influences:**

- o Which couples in the media - TV, YouTube, or in the movies - have a relationship that you admire? What is it about them?
- o Why do you think the media doesn't have more examples of people choosing abstinence?
- o What message do you think media gives teens today about relationships and sex?
- o What have you seen in the media/online that has made you feel uncomfortable?
- o Watch the marshmallow video together on the home page of [www.truetoyouokanagan.com](http://www.truetoyouokanagan.com) Ask them what things are worth waiting for, for them. Is sex one of them? (This is a good opportunity to let them know that you think they are worth waiting for and why.)
- o How do you think porn is changing the way people treat each other? Or even just look at each other?
- o What can we do in our home to help you make healthy Internet choices? Watch the Science of Pornography Addiction together on the website [www.truetoyouokanagan.com](http://www.truetoyouokanagan.com) - it's under resources. You can also watch videos on the website [Fight The New Drug: Home](http://www.fightthenewdrug.org) on the effects of pornography - created by students and for students to break free from porn addiction. (Preview to see if suitable for your child.)

### **Peer Influences:**

- o Have you ever seen any of your fellow students/friends being pressured? How did it affect you? How about the others watching?
- o How do you think you could get out of a bad friendship? Or are you just stuck with it?
- o Who would you go to at school if you were in trouble and needed help? What is it about them that makes you choose them?
- o Which of your friends is most interested in talking about sex? Which friends' responses surprise you when kids talk about sex?
- o Where do you see other students compromising what they value for their friends?
- o Have you experienced your friends respecting you even when they disagree with you? Why is that so important? (The freedom to be able to disagree.)
- o Do you find it easier to follow or lead? Why do you think that is?



## **Pornography - for discussions with children grade 3 and younger - from 10 Ways to Immunize Your Kids Against Pornography**

- o While looking through a photo book: “These are fun pictures of people we love but do you know that there are also very inappropriate pictures of people called pornography - pornography are pictures, videos or even cartoons of people with very little or no clothing on”
- o Relate to what you’ve experienced: “Sometimes when I’m on the internet, I accidentally see pictures of people with very little or no clothing on which make me feel very uncomfortable, have you seen any pictures like that?”
- o Share your concerns: “I really like sharing pictures and videos with family and friends online but sometimes friends or even family show inappropriate pictures with people who are treating each other in disrespectful ways”. What do you think is the best way to handle that?
- o When they hear words their friends use and they don’t know what they mean, they don’t want to look stupid, so they do what their parents do - look up the terms online, often linking them to porn. To prepare them for this possibility: “Have you ever heard a word being used by your friends or classmates that you don’t understand? Please feel free to come to me and we will figure it out. Looking up certain words on the internet, can lead to seeing pornography” Then share a personal story where you misunderstood a meaning of a word - can be silly
- o If you are with them when you see an inappropriate picture:  
What do you think of that picture?  
Why do you think it was taken?  
Who is it for? What’s the message behind it?  
What else have you seen online that has made you uncomfortable?

The statements below can be shared and then left hanging, leaving room for them to jump in or slowly step in.

- ☐ I wish someone had told me \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ I wish teens knew \_\_\_\_\_.
- ☐ I’ve noticed\_\_\_\_\_. (And let it sit)
- ☐ I’ve been wondering if \_\_\_\_\_.

Depending on how previous conversations have gone, they may be unsure about being honest, or they may be exploring their beliefs and go for the shock factor...seeing if they can get a reaction from you.

Remember! Watch your facial expression, body language and tone. It’s so easy to unwittingly disrespect another without meaning to.



It's important to respectfully disagree when you do. Timing is important. If they're exhibiting distress, it's okay to ask if they'd like to have this conversation at another time. Some people, like me, are also slower processors, so it takes awhile to figure out what you think and why.

The older your child is, the more likely that they already have an idea of how you feel about different issues. You may want to ask your teen, "What do you think my opinion is on this?" You can then let them know where they are correct and follow up with "Why do you think I think that?"

You can also let them know where you disagree with their assessment of your stance.

Before you ask the question though, you need to decide not to be offended if they don't understand your perspective or if they have a bit of attitude while they mimic your response. Be able to laugh at yourself. If their response does feel disrespectful, you can request they try again, without the tone, or eye rolling, or.....