

THE KEYS TO *connecting* WITH YOUR KIDS

The Fool Proof Plan for Easy
Communication and Meaningful
Connection with your Kids Every Day



Plus, 40
Amazing
Conversation
Starters!

introduction

**"COMMUNICATION LEADS TO COMMUNITY,
THAT IS, TO UNDERSTANDING INTIMACY
AND MUTUAL VALUING." -ROLLO MAY**

As a mother of three amazing kids, it has become one of my most important goals in my life to fully connect with the hearts of each of my children. To build a satisfying and lifelong relationship we each get to treasure.

It's been a long road of endless learning, misplaced priorities, and tons of bumps along the way.

Communicating effectively with my family hasn't always been my strong suit. I used to overcomplicate things leading to unnecessary stress which snowballed into lots and lots of yelling and frustration.

Even though being a mother was seriously something I always dreamed of, when it finally became a reality... I was left struggling.

Not because of my children and *their* inability to communicate effectively but because of my *own*.

What I didn't know early on, is the fundamental truth that the one that bears the responsibility for making sure a message is communicated correctly to the intended recipient is the sender *not* the receiver.

Have you ever sent a text message to someone without reading it first and received a response like this:

"???" or 🤔

Once you glanced back at your text you quickly realized that you sent your friend a bunch of gibberish! 😬

I think we've all done it!

What we *don't* do is blame the receiver for not knowing what we meant!

But we often do this when we talk to our family.

We say something we "think" our kids heard only to be frustrated later when we realize our message didn't get through. Sometimes because kids are distracted and don't always listen and sometimes because we didn't take the proper care in how we sent our message.

"COMMUNICATION IS A SKILL THAT YOU CAN LEARN. IT'S LIKE RIDING A BICYCLE OR TYPING. IF YOU'RE WILLING TO WORK AT IT, YOU CAN RAPIDLY IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE." - BRIAN TRACY

This small book is about communication and creating meaningful connection with your children of all ages... NOT learning how to get them to listen to you. *That's another book all together!*

Communication is not only a skill we can all learn to do better and most effectively for our families, **it's also the gateway to our child's heart.**

Which I mentioned earlier is my biggest goal in my life. I'm right now knee-deep in one daughter going through puberty, one that just conquered potty training, and one more who's just leading me on the adventure of a lifetime... she's just so full of life!

And while I'm very invested in cooking, chauffeuring, helping, cheering, leading and guiding - my biggest goal is CONNECTING.

Communicating effectively is the key to connection.

Section one

COMMUNICATION BASICS

If I fail to be able to talk to my kids at whatever age and stage they're at, I'm failing to really *connect* with them.

It's a lot harder to bond *to* a person's heart if you don't know what's *in* a person's heart.

And I want nothing more than the privilege of being the first (or at least one of the very first!) people my kids want to share with when they win, lose, or just want to talk about anything.

I want them to always know that they matter to me and that I support them in every decision they make... no matter my personal convictions.

I didn't say approve, but support. That's called unconditional love. And it's through my unrelenting desire to connect with them that they're able to know how much they're loved and treasured.

I want them to feel the same unconditional, unrelenting love I feel from my Savior, Jesus Christ. *It's through God's unrelenting desire to connect with my heart that I know I'm loved and set free to live a life I never could have imagined.*

It's my goal in this short and sweet book that you'll learn simple ways to make connection with your kids easier through better communication.

And just to be clear, whether you consider yourself a Christian or not, if you practice the concepts taught here, you'll see change.

It doesn't matter if you have toddlers or teenagers or both. Simply take the framework and adjust it to fit your kids. Take the conversation starters and use them with toddler while she's doing a craft or activity and use them with your teen in the car on the way to the orthodontist.

YOU SHOULD *Know*...

Throughout all these tips, there are two things that must stay in the forefront of your thinking both while you're reading this and putting the tips into practice - **Trust and Listening.**

Trust is vital to effective communication with our kids. If they fear they'll be judged, criticized, ridiculed, or even that their words will be shared outside of your conversation they'll never feel safe enough to share their heart with you.

There's only one exception to the sharing rule... your child should always know that depending on the severity of what is shared, you always reserve the right to loop in their other parent.

A large, vibrant red splatter graphic on the right side of the page, containing a quote in white text.

**"TRUST IS THE GLUE OF LIFE. IT'S THE MOST ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. IT'S THE FUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE THAT HOLDS ALL RELATIONSHIPS."
-STEPHEN COVEY**

This doesn't mean that I run and share every word my daughter tells me to her father. They have their own relationship. But it does mean, she knows she can't share a "secret" with me that I won't tell dad. This is a very dangerous cycle to get into so avoid this at all costs!

Though our goal as parents shouldn't be to become "friends" with our kids, we should treat our private conversations in the same sacred manner we do our own friendships.

They should always feel protected and supported by us. I know this isn't a book about marital communication but this is good wisdom for our other relationships too!

A red splatter graphic with a white border, containing a quote in white text.

**"TO LISTEN WELL IS AS
POWERFUL A MEANS OF
COMMUNICATION AND
INFLUENCE AS TO TALK WELL."
—JOHN MARSHALL**

Finally, listening to understand instead of to respond is something we expect our kids to do with us. We should practice doing the same with our kids.

Listening is also such a powerful parenting tool that too many of us don't use enough. I can say in my own communication disasters with my kids, most of the time it was because I was trying to exhibit my parental authority without ever stopping to understand what my child was really saying or how they were feeling.

We both left those conversations emotional, frustrated, and not at all connected. In addition, those negative feelings lingered on both sides. It's like when your spouse says something hurtful and that wounded feeling sticks around and causes you to withdraw instead of drawing closer.

DID YOU Know?

Ralph B. Smith observed that children ask approximately 125 questions a day while adults don't even come close to that with around 6 questions a day.

Sounds like as adults we lose that sense of learning and curiosity somewhere along this journey to adulthood.

I say we get that back! And we can start by asking thoughtful questions to our kids with the purpose of listening and learning.



Even though the the average number of words a typical person is able to listen to per minute is around 450, Our brains don't necessarily process all of them. Most people usually only remember about 17 to 25% of the things they listen to.

Section two

COMMUNICATION MISTAKES

Having meaningful conversation with a child can be tricky no matter their age and level of maturity. This is especially true if destructive communication patterns have been in practice for a long period of time.

In fact, it doesn't take long for a destructive communication pattern to take hold of a relationship that works like a parasite, sucking the life and love out of every conversation. One clear sign that this is happening is if every conversation feels like an exhausting marathon.

That's why the strategies shared in this book work wonderfully for *all* ages because the sooner you start them the better off you'll be!

Here are 3 things that many parents do while in a conversation with their kids that they often don't even realize they're doing. These work against them in every conversation they have with their kids.

These "communication mistakes" work to sabotage any and all attempts to create true connection with your child.

*When there are many words,
transgression and offense are unavoidable,
But he who controls his lips and keeps thoughtful
silence is wise. – Proverbs 10:19*

1. YOU TRY TO FIX EVERYTHING

A huge mistake well-meaning parents make as an act of love is to swoop in mid-conversation to try and *fix* their problem. After all, we're the parents with all the experience and wisdom, right?

Wrong. Well, yes you have wisdom and experience but hold your advice for now. Your child is wading through their issue and finding the right words and emotions to share them with you.

That's all that matters right now. Not fixing anything.

Listening allows your child to vent and be heard which is something we all need. It also allows your child to develop the skills to think critically and solve problems on their own.

2. YOU JUDGE THEIR FEELINGS

When your child is sharing their raw, unedited feelings about a situation or a person and we shift right into parent mode and say something like, "*now that's not a nice way to think about her*" or "*is that how I taught you to talk to a friend?*"

Our best course of action is to listen, listen, and keep listening.

Judging them, no matter how much we may want to in the moment, is off limits. Think of how we feel when we vent to a friend or spouse and we know deep inside we're totally overreacting but the last thing we want is to feel judged for our feelings. All we want is an ear to listen.

After they're done, try asking a question like, *"how do you think you handled the situation?"* or *"would you have done things differently if you could?"*

These are non-judgmental questions that allow your child to think and reason for themselves and self-edit their own behavior. Which is what we want!

Plus, they keep the conversation going and building more trust!

3. YOU AREN'T FULLY PRESENT

One of the most damaging things we can do repeatedly when in conversations with anyone is not give our full attention to the person.

Like when your kid tries to talk to you but your phone is literally still in your hand as you *umm hmm* through the conversation only occasionally meeting their eyes with yours. **This tells them you're not really listening.**

I know as women we're known for great multitasking skills but there's no place for multitasking in communication, with our kids or our spouse. Eye to eye communication is done best with our phone out of sight.

I already know what you're thinking... the last time your 10-year-old talked about their awesome Minecraft world they just created, they went on non-stop for twenty minutes. And you thought you actually fell asleep with your eyes open!

I get it... kids' conversations aren't always the most interesting for *us* but every conversation lays the groundwork for more meaningful ones down the road. Hang in there!



Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. – Philippians 2:4

YOU SHOULD Know...

If you see you're doing any of these things when talking with your child, take deliberate action to remind yourself when you do them so you can avoid doing them again.

You can do something like snapping a rubber band that you wear on your wrist every time you find yourself judging your child instead of listening to understand. This small popping sensation works to interrupt your thought and behavior pattern, giving you the path to create a new pattern.

The method you chose to use to help you stay on track isn't as important as getting it done and changing behaviors. So find what works for you.

You may be thinking, this all sounds so serious like we're talking about saving a marriage. I mean, we're just talking about kids, right?

Let me stop you right there. If you're thinking this is all too heavy and it doesn't really take all that. **I want to encourage you see your children as real people.** People that have the same feelings, fears, and challenges that we as adults do.

Our children need to matter to us on a profound level. The difference between parent and child relationships that are close well into adulthood and ones that never seem to connect, is whether or not the parent sees the relationship as valuable or not.

Let that sink in for a second... *valuable*.

When you see the relationship with your 3-year-old, 9-year-old, or 17-year-old as valuable (or better yet priceless) I promise you, they already know it.

*Children are a gift from the LORD;
they are a real blessing. – Psalm 127:3*

Section three

**MAKING
COMMUNICATION
EASY**

Now, let's talk about simple and effective communication tips to make having meaningful conversations with your kids so much easier.

1. **CREATE THE RIGHT ATMOSPHERE**

My husband is a huge sports fan! And that's an understatement. If I ever want to have an important conversation that involves being heard and understood, I'll never, ever have that conversation during game time.

Trying to have any conversation while his eyes are glued to the game will result in disappointment. And honestly it would be foolish and equally selfish for me to even try unless it was an emergency of some sort and in that case he'd gladly pause the TV.

The same goes for conversations we want or need to have with our kids. We need to know what's the best time *and* place to have that conversation or talk.

It could be "*the talk*" or a possibly contentious conversation that you're nervous to even bring up, or simply a daily checkin to see how your son is doing in his new school after a recent transfer.

Here are three powerful strategies for setting the right atmosphere for conversation:

REMOVE THE PRESSURE

If you know you're about to have a difficult conversation that may be uncomfortable for you or your child, try removing the "uncomfortable factor" of eye contact and have the conversation on a long drive.

This allows your child (great for tweens and teens) to be more vulnerable because you're not staring each other in the eye.

Though eye-contact is normally beneficial in conversation, sometimes it can be overwhelming and act as a barrier causing them to hold back or shut down.

MAKE IT PLAYFUL

Having conversation during moments of play is a great way to make conversations less intense or allows them to flow more naturally.

Children are less guarded while being playful.

Try going to the park or playing a game that doesn't require too much concentration and ask questions or use the conversation starters in this book.

You'll be laughing and connecting and your child will begin to make associations that talking with you is just as much fun as playing!

MAKE IT ROUTINE

Creating a routine of daily conversation is wildly beneficial to your relationship with your child. These can develop naturally or you can find a stop in your day that works well and encourage natural conversation at these times.

They can happen in any place and at any time. I have these daily conversations before bed with my middle daughter when we do our nightly read-aloud book. This is a fun nightly routine she loves. She has her own time with her dad when she curls up in our bed with him each morning to talk.

2. BE FULLY ENGAGED

When you're in a conversation with someone it's extremely helpful to the positive flow of each exchange when we validate the other person's words and feelings.

To validate a person doesn't mean you have to agree with what they're saying. It's rather a loving and supportive way to show the other person you're here with them and is a way of supporting them and strengthening the relationship even if maintaining a different opinion.

One of the most powerful ways to validate someone is being **fully engaged in the conversation.**

Have you ever been in a conversation where you felt the need to ask, "*are you still listening?*" That's a person who's not engaged at all in the conversation and it doesn't feel good on the receiving end.

We also show the other person we're engaged by offering eye contact and verbal queues.

Be looking at *them* and NOT your phone for starters. It's also helpful to add in phrases like, "uh-hmm, so what you're say is..., or sounds like you're saying that Jesse hurt you by...is that true?"

Section four

**FUN
CONVERSATION
STARTERS**

It can sometimes be challenging to get the conversation going for many reasons. Here are some fun conversation jump starters that are perfect for kids!

These are great for the car ride home after school, eating around the dinner table, before tucking the kids in at night, or anytime you want to connect with your children.

You can have a lot of fun with these by cutting them out and placing them in a jar or container and letting the kids draw them at random!

40 FUN *conversation starters*

Describe your most perfect day ever...

Describe your dream job. What would you be doing, where would you work, and how much money would you make?

If you could create a new planet what would you name it, and what would it be like?

Would you rather jump out of an airplane or make a presentation in front of 50 people?

If you could change your name, what would you name yourself? Why?

If you were given a million dollars and had to spend it all in one week, what would you buy?

What's your favorite thing to daydream about?

What's your biggest dream that you wish would come true?

What have your friends been up to lately?

How do you show people you care about them?

Describe the best thing about yourself.

Would you rather enter an eating contest to see who could eat the most fried chicken or cupcakes?

What does it mean to show love?

What is one place you want to travel to one day?

If you could change anything about your family what would it be?

If you could be an Avenger what would your special ability be?

If you could change any of the rules of this world which ones would you change?

Where would you want to go on vacation if we could leave right now?

What should we do more of as a family?

If you could have superpowers that no one would ever know about, describe what they could do.

What's one thing that another person does or says that lets you know they love you?

If you could create a new Crayola color, what would it look like and what would you name it?

What's the best book you've ever read?

What's your favorite family tradition?

Would you rather stay a kid and go to school all day or become an adult and go to work all day?

If you had your own motto, what would it be?

If you could have dinner with anyone who would it be?

Describe your worst job ever.

If you could go on vacation anywhere, where would you go?

Would you rather go to the Caribbean islands or on a skying trip in the snow covered mountains?

If you could make 3 family rules for our family, what would they be?

If you could live on your own private island but could only take 5 things, what would they be?

Describe the house you want to live in when you're a grown-up.

Would you rather be known for, being the richest person in the world or the kindest person that ever lived?

How many children do you want to have one day?

What should a parent do when their child doesn't obey?

What do you think makes a great friend?

Would you rather climb the tallest mountain or dive into the deepest ocean?

How do you know someone is a good friend?

Describe what makes you the most happy.

WHAT HELPED *my family...*

In closing, it's my biggest goal with this small book to inspire you to take deliberate action to improve your family's communication no matter where you are.

You don't have to be in a desperate place with your kids to use and love the tips shared here. You may already have a wonderful relationship with your children. In that case, you'll simply reap the rewards of even sweeter connection!

If you're like I was at the beginning of my journey, you may be feeling like you're not sure what you're doing wrong. You want connection, but you're overwhelmed and exhausted from all the other "mom stuff" that connection seems distant and confusing.

What single-handedly changed the game for me was seeing my kids as people I wanted to get to know more and understand... not only as my kids that I needed to lead, guide, discipline, and keep alive.

I started taking an interest in what *they* loved (even if I wasn't really into it), I asked more questions and offered less lectures, and when they messed up I practiced not losing it. I started treating them the way I would have liked to be treated in that same situation.

WHAT YOU *can do too...*

- ✓ Become a skilled observer and look for ways that you may be overreacting with your kids or saying hurtful things without even thinking about it.
- ✓ Instead of hearing your child and responding with your insightful and immediate parental wisdom. Try digging deeper by asking your child questions for real understanding. Questions like, "*what do you think about that?*" or "*how did/does that make you feel?*"

This method of asking before telling worked so well to strengthen my relationship with my oldest daughter that was beginning to struggle. She now feels heard and I learn so much more about her and her thought process that I never, ever would have if I just starting spouting advice!

- ✓ Find ways to carve out one on one and family time doing things each of your children like to do. This is not about signing your kid up for art classes if they like to draw. This looks more like doing something *together* like going to an art show or a museum.
- ✓ Make connection a priority. Changes won't happen overnight but they will overtime with prayer, consistency, and lots of grace!

MORE POSTS ON *family connection...*

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Why Your Tween's Moodiness is Likely Not Caused by Hormones

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50 Simple Ways to Speak Your Child's Love Language Everyday

The Secret to Raising Happy and Confident Teens in an Image Focused World

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