

## How to Start the Dialogue

While it's not easy to bring up such topics as drugs, drinking, sex and ways to relate positively to peers, parents have an obligation to create an open environment in which to start the conversation. Here are six steps to encourage your kids to talk about difficult issues.

1. Keep an OPEN environment – Be available to listen to your children. Give them plenty of opportunities to start a talk and don't criticize them for having questions, even if they raise ideas that are disturbing to you. Note that big ideas often begin as little thoughts slipped in the middle of a conversation about something else.
2. Give your Undivided ATTENTION – When the opportunity presents itself, focus your attention on the conversation and your child. Don't let other things distract you or divide your concentration. If it's really a bad time to talk, schedule and keep another time, but first make sure that waiting is okay with your child.
3. For IMPORTANT Topics, Start the Talk – If you think it's difficult for an adult to raise certain topics, imagine how hard it must be for a child.
4. Talk with your Kids ON THEIR LEVEL – Use examples from TV, movies, even your own experiences when you speak to your child. Keep your ideas clear and be sure that they relate directly back to your example.
5. Talk OFTEN – Frequent chats are a great way of communication, reinforcing your values and letting your kids know that you are interested in their lives.
6. UNDERSTAND the Questions and Answer Honestly – If you're not sure what your child is asking, say so. Once you understand the question, answer honestly and assure your child that you can come up with a solution together.

Don't be upset if your child is more comfortable talking with an aunt, uncle, family friend or teacher. In fact, encourage them to do so and keep in mind that the important thing is having someone to turn to for advice.