

# Family Discussions

*Move together, think together, be together!*



## Why are meaningful discussions important?

Creating meaningful and engaging discussions can seem impossible! If you or your kids are anxious, over-tired, stressed, hungry- it's almost impossible to get more than a one-word response.

But what happens when something big happens with the family? Let's say a loss of a loved one, moving, financial hardships, or divorce. Having the dynamics in place to have these conversations will always be our first step. The more we can engage in meaningful discussions, the more we will build a healthy, happy, and resilient family.



## Collective commitments

If we want to feel open to discussions, everyone must feel safe. [Click here](#) to watch a video that will help you come up with 3-5 collective commitments that you will make together as a family. This is where we give our kids an even playing field, so they feel open to talking to us, setting our expectations, and guiding each discussion.

## Rules or *Expectations*?

Rules are a list of things we should NOT do. They are normally daunting, negative, and they don't really allow our family to coach around situations. A lot of kids, and us adults too, love to get as close to the RULE as possible without breaking it.

Expectations are what we are wanting from a desired behavior using a positive framework and encouraging responsibility! *Wait what?!*

Let's say one of your family *rules* is: **No Cell Phones at the Dinner Table**

So, what happens if your child has an iPad? Kindle? iPod? Notepad to write a letter? Or ANYTHING that isn't technically a cell phone but is causing a distraction. Well, 'technically' they aren't breaking the rule that was established. But what was the intention of the rule? It was to keep distractions to a minimum, allow the family to talk/bond/enjoy each other instead of using a device that takes away this precious time.



Now let's try an **expectation** of: **Be Respectful**

If someone at the dinner table is now on their cell phone, iPad, game system, or anything... This is not showing respect to the other family members at the table. This is our opportunity to have a conversation about what is respect and what is not respectful. It allows no wiggle room of 'well this technically isn't a cell phone,' and still covers what we want- our family to engage with each other and not be on a device!



### "The Talk"

We have all had to talk to our kids about something uncomfortable before. It may have made us uneasy, and in turn, created a dynamic where everyone might want to avoid discussions like this in the future.

[Click here](#) to watch a brief video that describes how to have tough conversations and how to make it go as smoothly as possible.

### Quick Definition Guide:

**Regulate-** Control of our body, mind, and thoughts through being intentionally aware of how we are feeling.

**Co-Regulate-** Supporting someone else to help them regulate themselves by showing how you regulate yourself. Co-regulation as a process is sharing our calm and giving clear supportive directions.

## Three steps to have a successful “Talk”

1. Address the topic directly
  - a. If we start out superficial or ‘beating around the bush,’ we cause confusion. With confusion comes frustration. We want to be respectfully direct. If you need to tell your children about a divorce and you say, “I have some good news and bad news...” or “Mommy and daddy are taking a little time apart,” this causes our children to embrace several unneeded emotions. If we need to discuss a divorce, we want to take age/processing abilities into consideration, but we need to be direct. Example: “Mommy and daddy have talked for a long time and has made a decision that is the best for us all. We are going to be getting a divorce, which means...” This allows our children to explore and experience appropriate emotions through a situation. We also get to support them through this process! It will be tough for us too, and we want to keep ourselves regulated in this process.
2. Don’t be an expert and embrace feelings
  - a. Ask questions about current thoughts and feelings and embrace where they are emotionally with “The Talk.” You want to create an atmosphere of collaboration and mutually respecting each person’s feelings. We do this through asking questions and using affirmations and positive talk to each person through the process.
  - b. When we hear the feelings, we want to acknowledge them as normal. A lot of children, especially middle school aged children, are going through finding if their emotions/feelings are normal. When having “The Talk” you want to allow them to feel anything they feel and co-regulate with them.
3. Moving
  - a. When having “The Talk” you and who you are communicating with might be anxious. We know that through simple movements while having these difficult conversations! Try having the talk over a short walk and take the focus on just the topic.

### Things to avoid during “The Talk”

- Minimizing feelings
  - ‘Most people feel... during this’
  - ‘Don’t feel like that, it will be okay!’
  - ‘This isn’t sad- this is exciting. Think about...’
- Not asking questions and hearing everyone out
- Talking too much and not allowing pauses to process
- Being an expert on what is being talked about, even if you ARE an expert on the topic.



### Try to do these things during “The Talk”

- Using silence and pauses to allow processing time
- Talking slow and direct
- Being completely present in the moment (in our minds and with our non-verbals)
- Allow or even schedule check-ins after “The Talk” to allow deeper processing
- Offer support



## Building Family Community

We might live in the same house but sometimes our kids feel so distant. This video will give you prompts to have fun or in-depth discussions from anything from “If you had to pick a song to best describe today- what song would you pick?” to finding out why someone is being a little more withdrawn!

Here is a list of 5 conversation starters to get you started when having family time!

1. What kind of animal do you relate to the most?
2. What meme do you relate to most?
3. What are you looking forward to the most today?
4. What is a win from today?
5. Use an emoji to describe your mood.



For more conversation starters, [click here!](#)



## “I” Statements

Do we sometimes have the best intention but feel like we just triggered someone? This video will lay out how to speak in a way that launches our discussions towards success. I statements help develop empathy and avoid creating opposition.

### What are ‘I feel’ statements?

These are statements to center how YOU feel about something when saying a message! It helps to avoid triggering a situation more and creates healthier conversations! This is when we explain what we feel and why we feel that way. It helps show how to express emotions appropriately and avoids opposition.

Example 1:

- **Old Way-** *“I’ve told you three times to stop talking. Please stop.”*
- **New Way-** *“I feel overwhelmed and confused while you are still talking when I am talking. Do you need anything from me to help you right now?”*

Example 2:

- **Old Way-** *“Good Job!”*
- **New Way-** *“I feel so proud of you for working so hard in class this week. I know that you have been giving it your all even when it feels overwhelming!”*

Example 3:

- **Old Way-** *“Stop teasing your brother.”*
- **New Way-** *“I am disappointed and sad when I heard the teasing over not doing well on their assignment. What’s going on with you two?”*

## Your turn to Start Here.

Come up with 2 positive “I feel” statements and come up with 1 redirection “I feel” statement!

Positive example starters:

- I am proud to see/hear...
- I am excited that you...
- I am appreciative of you/your...
- I am grateful for...

Redirection example starters:

- I feel upset by...
- I am frustrated that...
- I am so sorry that...
- I am having a hard time understanding why...



## When, what, and where?

Okay, so we have a tough discussion but now what? This video will help you think about some stuff you might not be thinking of and allowing you to move from an awkward conversation to one that strengthens relationships. [Click here](#) to watch!



### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nathan Maynard is a youth advocate, educational leader, and change maker. He is the co-author of Washington Post bestselling and award-winning *Hacking School Discipline: 9 Ways to Create a Culture of Empathy and Responsibility Using Restorative Justice*. Nathan also is the co-founder of [BehaviorFlip](#), the first restorative behavior management software. Nathan studied Behavioral Neuroscience at Purdue University and has been facilitating restorative practices for over ten years. He was awarded “Youth Worker of the Year” through dedicating his time with helping underserved and underprivileged youth involved with the juvenile justice system in Indiana. He was on the founding administration team that opened Purdue University’s first high school in 2017, Purdue Polytechnic High School, serving youth in inner city Indianapolis, Indiana. Prior to his four years as a school administrator, he was a youth worker and program director in a youth residential treatment care center.

He is passionate about addressing the school-to-prison pipeline crisis and closing the achievement gap through implementing trauma-informed behavioral practices. Nathan has expertise in Dialectical Behavioral Coaching, Motivational Interviewing, Positive Youth Development, Restorative Justice, and Trauma-Informed building practices to assist with creating positive school climates.

# Family Discussions

## *Conversation Starters*



The authors of [Hacking School Discipline](#) have compiled a list of conversation prompts generated from their journeys to numerous schools throughout the United States. These prompts are great conversation starters that teachers have used with their students and can be easily used to initiate family discussions!

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1. What kind of animal do you relate to the most?
2. What meme do you relate to most?
3. What are you looking forward to the most today?
4. What is a win from today?
5. Use an emoji to describe your mood.
6. How would a friend describe you?
7. If you could have any superpower, what would it be?
8. If you could go anywhere, where would you go?
9. What are 3 traits you look for in a friend?
10. What color describes how you are feeling?
11. Share something that makes you happy.
12. What is something that you are good at?
13. Describe how you are feeling about \_\_\_\_\_ using weather terms (ex: sunny with clear skies).
14. What is something you are looking forward to?
15. What is something that scares you?
16. Talk about a time when a friend hurt you and how you handled it.
17. What do you want to be when you grow up?
18. What makes you feel loved?
19. What is your favorite candy? Optionally tell us a special memory while eating it.
20. What's your favorite season?
21. Talk about your best day.
22. Describe your favorite character from a book.
23. What's your star power?
24. What would be the best pet and why?
25. What is your favorite sport?

26. What sport that you have never tried would you like to try?
27. What is your favorite tradition?
28. Would you rather... (infinite possibilities). Ex: Would you rather be able to fly or be invisible? Ex: Would you rather play on the beach or in the snow?
29. What other language would you speak if you could?
30. What are your favorite pizza toppings?
31. What is your favorite ice cream?
32. If you were a zookeeper, which type of animal would you like to take care of?
33. What is your favorite part of the school day?
34. What Disney character are you most like?
35. If you were a teacher, what would you do the same or differently than what you've experienced as a student so far?
36. If you could change one thing about our school, what would it be?
37. What law would you make or change if you could?
38. I am an expert at \_\_\_\_\_.
39. What is something you want to be better at?
40. Favorite tv or movie character?
41. If a traffic light is yellow, should you slow down or speed up? Why?
42. If you had to eat one type of food for a week, what would it be?
43. Who do you admire?
44. What is your favorite thing to do at recess?
45. I work best when....
46. I sometimes feel jealous when...
47. I feel happy when...
48. I feel angry when...
49. Sharing is good because...
50. When do you feel lonely?
51. When have you been congratulated and how did it make you feel?
52. What song makes you happy?
53. What's your favorite word?
54. What's your favorite dessert?
55. What chores do you have?
56. What was the last thing you ate?
57. Talk about a time when you had fun at school.
58. What do you want to "be" today? Ex: A friend, leader, listener, etc.
59. Who was the funniest character that you've read about or seen in a show or movie?
60. Describe how you feel using a food item.
61. Talk about a time when you felt proud of yourself.
62. What makes you smile?
63. What type of animal best describes your mood today?
64. If you had a million dollars, what would you buy first?
65. Talk about a time when you gave up.
66. Talk about a time when you persevered.
67. What is the best advice you've ever received?
68. When I get stuck on a math problem, my next step is to...

69. How do you remember information best for tests?
70. What is your favorite subject?
71. What is your favorite store to visit in-person and/or visit online?
72. How do you deal with stress?
73. Favorite app?
74. What have you never tried that might surprise others?
75. What is your pet peeve?
76. What strategies do you use to manage your emotions?
77. Do you agree with the phrase “money can’t buy happiness?” Explain.
78. Is a glass half empty or half full?
79. Would you rather have \$100 right now, or get \$10 a week for 15 weeks?
80. What are your strategies for survival if zombies take over the world?
81. Would you rather be able to run fast or jump high?
82. What is one of the biggest issues facing kids/teenagers today?
83. What does it look like and feel like to be supported?
84. Where do you feel safest?
85. What is an activity, sport, or person that you feel is underrated?
86. What is something (appropriate) that no one knows about you?
87. What is the best fast-food place?
88. What do you fear?
89. What jobs do you think will not be around when you enter the workforce?
90. What jobs do you think will exist in the future?
91. What skills do you think technology can’t replace?
92. What makes you feel pressured? How do you deal with it?
93. What frustrates you?
94. Should the toilet paper be placed to pull from the top or bottom?
95. What does freedom mean to you?
96. How do you make a decision?
97. What was a tough decision you had to make?
98. Are you a night or morning person?
99. What makes you sad?
100. What is mental toughness?
101. What is your opinion about social media?

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[Join educators](#) from all around the world to find more tips and discuss important topics related to:

- Social-emotional learning
- Restorative practices
- Trauma-informed practices
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Mindfulness

