



The Art of Connection: how to create strong bonds with our kids during the primary school years and beyond.

by Rebecca Sparrow



A few years ago I spent several days interviewing a group of teens asking them what they wanted their parents to know. Without fail every one of them said they wanted their parents to connect with them. To tune in. And – most crucially – to create an environment where the kids would run towards their parents when they screwed up and not away from them in fear of getting in trouble. Our kids want to feel like we’re in their corner.

So how do we build those bonds with our kids in a world that so often feels too busy and too overwhelming? Here are a few simple but effective ideas.

1. THE PARENT/CHILD BOOK

One of the best tools I used to keep the lines of communication open when my daughter was a tween was our shared journal.

The rule was that she writes to me in the book and then puts it on my bedside table. So, when I see it there, I know she wants to tell me something. I’m not allowed to talk to her in person about whatever she’s written about it. Instead I write back.

One of the things I love about this journal is that for the rest of her life; she’ll have this notebook filled with my handwriting. My voice and hers. And our connection.

You can buy a journal. You can create your own. But having a private journal gives your tween or teen another way to talk to you without having to face you. Remember that feeling of wanting to share something with your parents but not wanting to make eye contact. THAT. Some kids I know prefer having big conversations while they’re playing pool. Or going for a drive. But add this tool to your child’s communication toolbox. If there’s something they want to discuss with you, but they can’t bear to make eye contact with you - they can write to you about it.

You can find a [gender neutral journal here](#).



2. RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

I have always, always loved family rituals and traditions.

American author Gretchen Rubin who has dedicated several non-fiction books to the study of happiness and habits says that rituals have this rather amazing dual ability of both COMFORTING us and ENERGISING us at the same time. And even better than that they imbue us with a sense of belonging.

Rituals and traditions act like scaffolding to our children's lives. They are these dependable, unmovable structures which help us feel safe and secure. Even if your kids roll their eyes at Taco Tuesday – it doesn't matter. Keep going. Because deep down those hokey family moments are the glue which bind. Family movie nights, a Saturday morning bike ride, Sunday afternoon roast, a Sunday evening challenge shooting hoops – these things can be precious to our children even if they don't show it. Think about developing some new family rituals whether it's Sunday morning pancakes or Friday night boardgames.

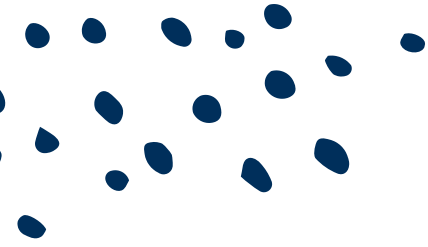
3. ASK THEM TO RATE THEIR DAY FROM 1-10

Kids often don't have the language to articulate to you what's going on for them. And there's A LOT going on for them right now. So, asking them to give you a number is an easier way to get a snapshot of how they're doing. Maybe they'll tell you they're a 5/10. So, then you can ask "What do we need to do to get you from a 5 to a 6?"

3. PUT YOUR PHONE DOWN

The number one thing kids want is for their parents to put down their phones. We are the generation spending the most time in person with our kids but who are the least engaged.

When your child wants to engage with you put your phone down and out of sight. Give them your full attention.



4. GO INTO YOUR CHILD'S WORLD

Whatever your child loves – take the time to experience it with them. Lego. YouTube clips. Taylor Swift. Netball. Xbox. A certain TV series. Rather than dismiss it – spend some time with them in the activity – they will love you for it! So often as adults we push our kids to enjoy what WE love. Flip that and instead go into her world.