



How to get your kids to talk to you

"My son grunts most of the time!"

A client asked me how to talk to her 14 year old son when she knew that something was bothering him but he wouldn't open up. Let's begin with some basic biology. Boy's brains are wired slightly differently to girl's brains.

Within a girl's brain, a lot more sharing goes on between the right and left hemispheres. This means that emotions registering on one side of the brain are partially processed on the other side where logic, reasoning and language are centred. In a boy's brain, however, there is less connection and thus less back and forth between the two hemispheres. Emotion and language lie on either side of a divide. Boys can sometimes take hours to process emotively and often not fully until they are in their late teens.

"What to do" I hear you ask? Here is a list of tried and true techniques to get them to open up :

- Don't take it personally - it's usually not about you and if you take it personally you will get defensive and bite back
- Breathe - take a couple of deep breaths before you think of speaking
- Pick the right moment - at night when they have gone to bed, go up and sit on their bed and ask them "what was challenging about their day"
- Start a conversation while in the car - no eye contact can often help with boys
- Go for a walk, or do some exercise together - this will allow him to open up more
- Listen with your lips shut - don't give advice or lecture, simply listen
- They really want your presence and support not necessarily your advice
- Give them time - it may take a few days for them to pluck up the courage to get it off their chest
- Don't be judgmental - this will kill the connection and the conversation
- Ask yourself this question - "is what I'm about to say going to bring them closer to me or push them further away"



What about girl's? Well pretty much the same tips apply, however, the mother-daughter relationship can be very intense. During this period of adolescence when the teenage daughter is faced with the task of differentiating herself, the mother- daughter relationship becomes one of alternating intimacy and hate, both marked with an intensity that only teenagers can bring to a relationship and bring out of their parents.

Teenage girls want both their freedom from and their connection to their mothers, but they are just not sure how to navigate the terrain and as a result give a lot of mixed messages. Interestingly enough it is a time when their daughters need independence and their mums need connection.

Mother's will do best if they learn to stay close while also giving their daughters the space in which to claim their independence. Always ask yourself the question: "Is what I am about to say or do going to bring them closer to me or push them further away?"

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou