

## TABLE TALK

"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."  
James 1:5

\* No phones: move them off the table or in another room charging

\*Conversation starters:

- What made you laugh?
- What did you do to help someone?
- What made you frustrated, angry, or mad?
- How did you handle these feelings?

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### **Fork it over.**

Take a fork, tie a ribbon around it, and call it the "talking fork" (a big serving fork is good for dramatic effect). Before everyone leaves the table, they need to own the fork and tell a story. It can be about their day, or anything else, but they need to share something. This works well with younger children who are enthusiastic about using their imaginations and being the center of attention, if only for a minute. Applauding at the end of everyone's story, however short or long, is also important.

### **Have a bowl-a-thon.**

Literally place a bowl or other container in a central part of the house (the kitchen or dining room table perhaps?) and encourage family members to put items in there for discussion later. It could be an article ripped from the newspaper, a recipe someone wants Mom or Dad to try, a book, a drawing, a rock, or a leaf. Use your imagination

### **Be creative with your questions.**

Some possibilities: "Was there a time today when you were courageous? How were you creative today? What are you most thankful for?" I know many parents that start off by going around the table and having each person share the "best part" or "worst part" of his or her day. Another likes saying one thing that made them mad, sad, and glad that day. Parents play, too!

### **Be honest, and show your flaws.**

Asking kids of all ages for input helps you get them in your corner. "Hey guys, I could use your advice with this situation I'm having at work. Can you help me?" Children love to feel that their opinion matters. This kind of discussion gets your kids focused on problem-solving. It also helps ensure that they'll be more likely to come to you when they have an issue.

### **Try family-neutral topics.**

Some families may want to skip to discussions about themselves and go straight for events - news, or local and seasonal events, instead of focusing on one particular family member or topic.

### **Make dinner fun.**

Do the occasional out of the ordinary thing by dressing the table up with seashells for a "beach" theme and talking about favorite vacation memories. Or put on lively music and discuss why you do (or don't) like what you hear; tweens and teens may love this option if you let everyone take turns creating the playlist.

### **Talk sports.**

For those kids who are into sports, nothing gets them going like talking about their favorite team. It also opens the door for plenty of follow-up questions such as, "Why do you like that team? Who is your favorite player? When will the winning streak end?" and so on.

### **Bring up the past.**

Tell your kids about their grandparents, about what you were like as a kid, about the day they were born, or any other fun family stories. Ask them how far back they can remember from their childhood, or pull out pictures from when they were even littler to see if they spark memories.

### **Stay connected.**

This is especially crucial in the tween and teenage years. Listen to your child's music. Look at the magazines she's reading and TV shows she's watching. Ask pop culture questions so you're up on their interests. But remember to make sure you don't ask questions that lead to "Yes" or "No" answers!

### **Don't nag.**

The dinner table is not a time to ask your child about homework. It's also not the time for you and your husband to discuss work. Respect when a child doesn't want to talk, but remind her she still has to sit at the table. You want your kids to know you value discussion and conversation but also understand that not everyone wants to contribute all the time.

[Jeanne Muchnick](#) is the author of *Dinner for Busy Moms*, which includes plenty more advice for how to get healthy meals on the table, even if you're not a cook. The mom of two picky-eating daughters lives in Larchmont, NY, and has also written for *Parents* and *Woman's Day*