

**100 Questions to Ask Your Kids**  
**From <http://www.familyeducation.com/home/>**

*An Introduction for Parents*

"What happened today at school?"  
"Nothing."  
"How was the movie?"  
"Good."

Yuck! Is this bonding? Is this intimacy? Is this even news? Surely this isn't the kind of communication we fantasized about when we first decided to have children. No, we thought about all those late-night talks we would have over hot chocolate, musing about school or friends or – whatever. And maybe, from time to time, we do have heartfelt conversation that feels like we are really getting hold of our children's day to day lives – even their inner feelings.

But most of the time it's frustrating because we know that we are missing so much good stuff. We want to know more about their random thoughts, their hopes, their preferences, their perspective, their disappointments, what they are learning about life. We want to know them better. We want to know them the best we can.

And guess what? Our children are missing some of the good stuff about us, too. Most of the time, parents are the ones who start the conversations and set the terms for discussion. And some of the things that kids might be interested in never surface. Sometimes because parents introduce subjects that are interesting to themselves, they forget that there are all kinds of other questions that are primarily interesting to kids. So if parents are the only ones who get to select the topics of the day – it's boring. Or it's threatening – like questions about how school went today, or how did you do on your test? Or open-ended questions like "Whatever happened to that friend of yours. Jimmy?"

Kids sometimes don't like these kinds of questions because they think of them as unsafe territory – where is this kind of questioning going to lead? Am I going to get a lecture? Are we just sentences away from turning from a casual mention of my friend into the usual warnings about not spending too much time away from my homework? Kids often shy away from conversation because (a) it means trouble, not fun; (b) it's not about something they really care about; or (c) the questions are too broad, too hard for them to organize into any easy, focused answer. Result? Monosyllabic answers and very short conversations.

*A Better Idea*

It's not hard to think of a better idea than badgering your child to distraction, trying to extract some kind of information. The premise of this book is that communication can actually be fun for both parties – if it's seen as playful, occasionally suspenseful and surprising (in a good way), and if both parties (parent and child) are on equal footing. "Equal footing" means mutual control over the conversation so that the child, as well as

the parent, gets to ask some of the questions he or she wants to ask, and everybody gets an equal chance to hold forth and be in the spotlight. No one interrupts the speaker, everyone gets an equal opportunity to ask a question, and each person gets to ask the question he or she is interested in having answered.

It might not seem very radical to say that in this "game" each person gets some uninterrupted time to answer a question and each person gets a chance to ask something that he or she thinks is really interesting, but the truth is, it doesn't happen with any regularity in most households. Several studies have found that there are fewer than twenty minutes a day of conversation between parents and children if you subtract talking that has to do with a command or criticism. There is also a lot of evidence that interruption is common – and usually done by the person with the most power. So guess how kids experience conversation: however it's begun, the parent often doesn't let the kid finish the thought (or complaint).

But this time, we aren't going to let each side fall into their old habits. Because this time it's a game – and in games, we follow the rules. And the rules here are to listen, to have a chance to get your thoughts across, and to answer honestly without being cut off.

To differentiate this game from other conversation (and, I hope, to set a model eventually for other conversation) the game begins at a certain time. I suggest either during dinner – especially if you are sick and tired of silent meals punctuated only by the television or lectures that you personally deliver – or after dinner, when the homework is finished and it's almost lights out. Car trips are good, too, if you, the driver, can tolerate thinking and driving at the same time. But, to begin this game in the right spirit, ask your kids when they would like to play it – give them the choice of during dinner, after dinner, in the car next Sunday, or some other time you suggest. Remember, for a lot of kids, totally open-ended questions are yucky.

### *Getting Kids Interested*

The questions in this book are organized around a lot of topics that kids want to know about – often about you. They are also organized around questions that help you and your children to be introspective. A little navel gazing isn't bad – adults pay psychologists a high fee to help them do it, so it's fun and inexpensive to do it this way, not in crisis, just exploring. Kids want to know you – the real you, the sometimes-imperfect you – and this helps them get backstage, behind the parent performance you find yourself doing despite your desire to do the contrary.

And because disclosure invites reciprocity, your openness will encourage their openness and their interest. At the end of these conversations you should all feel you know each other – and yourselves – a little better. This is a lot of fun. So once you do this, you will all want to do it again (provided you don't let the game go on too long). However, there is always the issue of getting kids interested enough to try it. So here is the way to get them intrigued: turn to the first page of questions that kids can ask parents.

Ask if any of those sound interesting. I think at least one of them will sound enticing, except perhaps for very young children. (This book works best for kids in middle school

and older, but some younger kids are so with it that they will have no problem at all getting into the spirit of asking questions. We've had five-year-olds ask and answer some of these questions as if they were on a T.V. game show.) Then show your Kids some of the questions that you could ask them – a lot of them will be questions that they will want to answer: questions about their favorite music, why they like (or don't like) heavy metal bands, the three most disgusting foods they have eaten at home, etc. Wouldn't you have liked to tell your parents the answer to "What meal would you prefer never to have again?" (assuming, of course, they could be good sports about it)?

If you promise that you'll only play for half an hour (or less, depending on your kids), most kids will be open to trying the game. You can always re-up for another half an hour if everyone still wants to keep going. Just lay out the rules right at the beginning – and make sure everyone agrees. They are:

1. No answer is stupid. No grimacing, eye rolling, or in any way laughing at someone unless they are saying something funny.
2. Everyone gets to answer without interruption. Follow-up questions are allowed ("But I thought you liked beets!"), but follow-up answers aren't required. "Nope" will suffice (as an answer to the follow-up). However, if the person wants, they can do a whole riff on the history of beet hating – you asked, after all.
3. Questions that hit a recent sore spot should be avoided if at all possible. For example, if your child has just missed making the team or been dumped by a major heartthrob, you might want to avoid those kinds of questions the first couple of times you play the game (unless you think he or she wants to talk about love and its disappointments).
4. Everyone is, in fact, allowed to avoid two questions per game – more if they really insist upon it. This has to be fun, remember? We want kids to insist that time gets saved before bedtime to play 201 – so better to lose one answer than to lose their interest and confidence in the whole game.

### *100 Questions for Parents to Ask Kids*

1. Tell me the five best things about you.
2. What does the word "success" mean to you?
3. Why do kids put rings in their eyebrows and nose?
4. If you could tell me never to serve two vegetables again, which two would you choose?
5. Who do you think I'd rather you be: an NBA ballplayer, the mayor, a famous explorer, or a movie star? Why?
6. Which of your friends do you think I like the most? Why?
7. On a scale of one to nine – one being not at all and nine being totally – how strict do you think I am? Where on the scale would you like me to be? (Parents: you can draw this on paper to make it easier for smaller children.)
8. What would be the ideal allowance? Tell me how you would use it.
9. Who was the worst teacher you ever had? Tell me why.
10. What would the ideal teacher be like?

11. If you had to have one of these, which would pick – and why? Really long nose hairs, hair in your ears, hair above your lip, massively hairy armpits!
12. How much privacy would you like? What time of the day would you like to be alone, and why?
13. Which one of our friends is the funniest looking? Why?
14. If you could arrange it, what time would I come home from work? Then, what would we do together?
15. Can you think of any clothes that I should never put on again? Why?
16. Do you think I drink too much? Have I ever embarrassed you that way?
17. Which of the following choices do you think would be best, and why?

- Dinner with everyone at the table and the TV on with your favorite program
- Dinner in which everybody took what they wanted from the fridge and no one had the same thing
- Dinner with the whole family together and no TV on

18. If a genie would give you only one wish, which would you pick, and why?

- being world-class attractive
- being a genius
- being famous for doing something great

19. If you are feeling sad, what meal that I could make or order would be the one that would cheer you up?

20. Are you afraid when we fly?

21. Tell me who you think are the three greatest musicians in the world? Why?

22. What punishment have I given you that you thought was really unfair? Why?

23. If you could change three things about yourself, what would they be?

24. At what age do you think a child ought to be tried as an adult if he has hurt someone very badly? Why?

25. If you could keep your room any way you wanted, how would it look?

26. How much money could you use a week? Why?

27. What kinds of lies do your friends tell their parents?

28. If you had to have a disability, which one of these would you pick, and why?

- blindness
- deafness
- inability to walk

29. What are the qualities that make a good friend?

30. Do you think you should be paid for specific chores? Which ones? And how much do you think each is worth?

31. What was your favorite toy when you were little?

32. What do you say to comfort yourself when something scares you (like when a plan is bumpy, or when you are in a scary place)?

33. What do you think makes a person good-looking?

34. What would you do if you saw a group of guys who looked like a gang walking toward you?

35. If you could decorate our place, what would it look like?
36. What do you think of my driving?
37. Looking at your pictures. When you think you have been the cutest so far?
38. What do you think are the characteristics that make a good parent?
39. Name the three movie stars you most admire.
40. Have you ever imitated something you saw in a movie? What was it?
41. Do you think kids ought to get sex education? If you do, what kinds of things are appropriate? If you don't, why not?
42. Name a TV or movie star that you think is lame.
43. Do you think it's important to get physical education in school? Why or why not?
44. Do you think I lose my temper too often? If so, how often?
45. What do you think is the right amount of hugging and kissing that should go on between kids and their mom? How about kids and their dad?
46. What is the most enjoyable thing our family has done together in the last three years?
47. Do you think that kids as young as twelve can fall in love? If not, at what age do you think that happens?
48. What do you think is beyond the stars?
49. What is the nicest thing a friend has ever done?
50. Why do you, or don't you, like violent movies?
51. Name two things we should do as a family on the weekend.
52. How do you think kids are affected by divorce?
53. Do I ever not notice that you are sad? What signs should I look for?
54. What sport (that you haven't tried) do you think you would be good at? Why?
55. Who is the meanest kid you know? Why?
56. Do you believe in heaven? If not, why? If so, what do you think it's like?
57. If you were going to have a weird, unusual pet, what would it be? Why would you want that pet?
58. If you could look like anyone, who would it be? Why?
59. Do you think "honesty is always the best policy"? Why or why not?
60. What have you done, in school or sports or anywhere, that you are especially proud of?
61. Do you think girls look better with or without makeup? Why?
62. Do you think it's bad, okay, or good for guys to cry at movies? Why?
63. Which of your friends are you proudest of? Why?
64. Have you ever had a dream that really scared you? What was it about?
65. Can you describe the most beautiful place you have ever visited?
66. What kinds of things on TV and in movies make you laugh?
67. Tell me about your two favorite movies of all time and why you like them so much.
68. How do you describe me to your friends?
69. Do you feel you are as intelligent as most of your friends? Why or why not?
70. What is the scariest movie you've ever seen? Why?
71. Have you ever gotten really lost? If so, tell me about it. How did you feel?
72. How much TV a day do you think a kid should watch?
73. At what age, if any, do you think a kid should be able to watch any program no matter what is in it?
74. Do you think you live in a dangerous neighborhood? Why or why not?
75. Not counting our religion, which religions do you find interesting? Why?

76. Tell me what you think is good, or bad, about rap music.
77. Do you ever feel you could lose your temper so badly that you could hurt someone? If so, what has made you feel like that?
78. What is the grossest thing you can think of?
79. Has an adult ever hit you that you haven't told me about?
80. Is there anybody in history that you have read about that you would like to be?
81. What do you think is the right age for marriage? Why?
82. Tell me three things you remember about kindergarten.
83. What kids are popular in your grade? What do you think makes a person popular?
84. Has anyone ever tried to sell you drugs? If so, what did you say to that person?
85. If you knew a friend of yours had stolen something, what would you do about it?
86. Do you feel close to any of your grandparents, aunts, or uncles? If so, to whom do you feel closest?
87. What paper have you written that you really felt proud of? Tell me about it.
88. If you could trade lives with somebody you know, who would it be?
89. How do you think you would feel if you thought you were going to be the first person to meet someone from outer space? What would you say or ask?
90. What would you do if you were invisible for a day?
91. What is your very earliest memory as a very little kid?
92. Do you think any of our neighbors are scary?
93. What would you do if you found out one of your teachers was homosexual?
94. Is there anything you pretend you understand, but you really don't? What is it?
95. Who do you think you are most like in our family? Why?
96. Do you believe men and women are equally smart? Why or why not?
97. Do you ever have a dream that comes back over and over? If so, what is it like?
98. Why do you think some people don't like animals?
99. What kind of person should be President of the United States?
100. Why are sports so important to kids?  
for you?