



Ascension

Ascension WI
Employee Assistance Program

Parenting During COVID

Getting Kids to Talk

Parents and kids sitting across from each other is usually the hardest way to get a child to talk about how he or she is feeling. They get nervous, clam up and just say, "I don't know." It feels intimidating, causing parents to feel frustrated—"You never talk to me!" Don't worry, this is normal! There are better ways to get your child to open up, so try these ideas instead:

Throw a ball back and forth. While they are distracted with the ball, ask them how they're doing. You might say, "With everything going on, I've been feeling more stressed lately. Have you?"

For a harder challenge, get two balls. Each person throw to each other and catch it at the same time. After each catch ask them to tell you something they are grateful for before continuing the game.

Go for a car ride. Spending time one on one with your child or adolescent in the car is a great time to talk. (There's something about sitting side-by-side rather than face-to-face that makes it a little easier to open up.)

Be a good role model. Talk about things in your life, and how you felt about them (in an age-appropriate way, of course). For example, you might tell your child "I felt [fill in the blank] when I heard about the riots this week. Or, "I was

really hurt when a friend treated me poorly at work. This is how I handled it..." You might ask your child if they have had similar experiences or emotions, and how they dealt with it.

Spend alone time with your child. Spending one on one time with your child sends the message that you value them. Let them pick the activity, and allow them to direct the play. Avoid taking over the activity; just play along. Notice if there are any themes that come out during playtime (aggression or isolation vs. kindness or consideration for others, etc.).

Later (not during the activity) comment on your observations. You might say, "This afternoon when we were playing that board game I noticed that you always offered to let me go first. That was very kind of you," or "I noticed that Bunny was always picking on the other stuffed animals. Can you tell me about that?"

Practice Gratitude. Go around the dinner table and have everyone say one thing they appreciate from the day. Start with the adults. Research shows that living with an attitude of gratitude has a plethora of physical and mental health benefits.

For more ideas, contact your EAP. Free and confidential help is only a phone call away.