



## **Making Conversations with Young People Work**

### **KEEP IT GOING**

It's one thing to ask a question and sit back for the answer. It's another thing to really engage in a conversation. Asking follow-up questions or providing open-ended responses are great ways to keep the conversation going. Remember the idea is not to debate, but to learn more. Some old standbys include:

- "That's interesting. Tell me more."
- "Have you always thought this way?"
- "Interesting. Have you thought about...?"

### **THE CONVERSATION DOESN'T HAVE TO BE HEAVY**

It's important to have conversations about subjects that matter deeply. It's also important to listen to why a young person likes a current fad, music star, or TV program.

### **BE PREPARED FOR THE UNEXPECTED ANSWER**

You may ask a question and get an answer you did not want or expect. If an answer bothers you, simply listen and ask more questions about why the young person thinks and feels that way. You could buy time with responses such as "What makes you believe that?" or "Could you tell me more?" These responses will help you to avoid judging right away and learn a little bit more about their point of view.

### **LISTENING IS MOST IMPORTANT**

Through careful listening, we tell youth we care about their thoughts and we care about them. Try very hard not to judge them and do not tell them the answers or give your opinion unless it is asked for. Simply listen.

### **ENJOY THE EXCHANGE**

Teenagers are very wise. By intentionally engaging in conversations with them, we can learn a lot. Listen for their convictions and passions. Support their newly forming independence and be prepared to have the tables turned on you. Youth wonder about who we are under our adult exteriors!

Below are a few categories for different conversation starters:

### **SUPPORT**

- Which adults in your life have helped you become who you are? What did they do?
- What's the best advice an adult ever gave you?
- What questions would you like adults to ask you or your friends?

### **EMPOWERMENT**

- Name something you have always wished you could do. How could you make it happen?
- Complete this sentence: One way I'd like to change the world is...
- Tell about a time when you wanted to stand up for something or someone, but were afraid to. What would you do differently now?

### **CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME**

- When you spend time at home, what is your favorite thing to do?
- What are your favorite types of web sites to visit? Why?
- Are you afraid to try new things because you think you won't be good at them? How could you encourage yourself more?

### **COMMITMENT TO LEARNING**

- What do you say if someone asks you how you're doing in school? How would you know if you are doing well?
- Of all your classes this term, which one will help you most in the real world?
- What is the hardest part of school this year? Is it homework? Assignments? Tests? Getting along with classmates?

### **POSITIVE VALUES**

- Was there a time when you had to stand up for something you believed even when your friends weren't behind you 100 percent? What did you learn from the experience?
- Who is the nicest person you know? What qualities or actions make you think of her or him that way?
- How do you react if someone doesn't agree with what you believe?

### **SOCIAL COMPETENCIES**

- At your school, what does it mean to be popular?
- Who is your best friend? What are his or her three best qualities?
- Are you comfortable around people who are different from you? Why or why not?

## POSITIVE IDENTITY

- Name three things that made you smile today.
- If you could ask any four people to dinner, who would you ask and why?
- What would you rather do: give a speech in front of 200 people or parachute from a plane?
- If you could achieve only one great thing in your life, what would it be?