



Getting Your Child to Open Up to You

There are many things that only happen if you don't force them to happen. Getting children to open up is one of them. The more we wheedle, cajole, or pester, the less likely they are to talk.

Sharing from the heart is based on a special kind of trust that is earned over time. Sometimes we get caught up in our own lives and then, when there is something we need to talk about with our children, we go to them and press them for answers. But the answers do not come until the relationships are strong.

My wife gets our children to open up by being there for them. She makes time for one-on-one activities with each of them. In addition, she tries to be there when they are likely to want to talk, whether it is after school, after the game, after the date, or at bedtime. She pays attention to the moods of our children and listens to anything they want to say. She remembers what things are happening in their lives, and she asks them about those events.

One of the best ways to build a relationship is to be understanding. Understanding is not the same as agreeing. If a child cries out, "I hate my brother!" you do not agree that the brother is indeed a detestable creature. But it is appropriate to say, "Sometimes we get angry with each other. Sometimes we feel very upset." Such an approach allows a child to explore his or her feelings and heal from the inside.

Sometimes our children lose their trust in us because we try to guide them without understanding them. When I was a young man, a friend and I would engage in silly mischief in the hour between arriving at school and when school began. I thought it was inventive, but from the adult perspective, it was inconsiderate.

At the dinner table, I told my parents what "my friend" had been doing before school. They reacted with judgment and dismay so I did not tell them that I was a full partner in the mischief. Had my parents responded to my tale with "Hmmm. How do you feel about that?" I would have laughed at the inventiveness of it, and they could have seen it from my perspective, "Ah, yes. It's sounds fun." The gateway to trust is the willingness to see the world from another person's perspective.

The traditional wisdom is that we must walk a mile in the other person's moccasins. Notice that the saying does not suggest we stay in those moccasins forever. When we have walked far enough with the other

people's perspective to appreciate their view of the world, then we can challenge them to see in other ways.

After we have established a relationship of trust, we can help our children develop a broader understanding of the world that includes the perspectives of others. We cannot effectively lead them to see the perspective of others until we have compassionately taken their perspective. That is the starting point.