



# Communicating with Kids about School: Tips and Questions to Ask

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If you're a parent of an older elementary student, say a 7 or 8-year old, you know how it goes; if you ask your kids how school was on any day of the week, the most likely answer is a terse, "fine". In contrast to the ever-talkative toddler and preschool years, older children start to pull away from parents to become more independent and private sometime after the first grade.



While this communication gap might seem harsh for a parent who enjoys having a close relationship with their kids, you can be rest assured that it is completely normal! Even so, there are many ways to get reluctant talkers engaged in conversation and even sharing about their school day. Communication with children can be tough sometimes, but when we stop to observe and listen to kids, we can ask the right questions to get a response.

If you've been struggling with communicating with your child after they hop in the car or enter the house each day, keep reading below to discover more about the importance of engaging them in dialogue, and the right things to say to get them talking.

## The Importance of Communication About School

If you think back to your own schooling, you might not remember your own parents questioning too much about your day. Parents today attended school in a bygone era that seemed a bit safer than it does today. With new advancements in technology and social media, additional safety drills and concerns, and a spotlight on childhood bullying and depression, it's absolutely essential for today's parents to feel confident that their children seem safe and happy when they're dropped off at school each morning.

Because of our changing world, it's necessary to check in with kids to ensure their happiness and success in both academics and life. Further, the sooner a parent knows about an issue, the quicker it can be addressed, whether it's a learning problem in math, or a social issue between friends. To maintain kid's math skills, there is no other way than practicing [math worksheets for kids](#). But with children offering nothing else but one-liners like good or fine when asked about their day, communication with kids quickly shuts down.

So, what is a parent to do when faced with a tight-lipped child? The key lies in listening to them, making oneself available, and asking the right questions.

## Getting Kids to Talk: Tips to Start Afterschool Dialogue

Some kids are naturally more private, shy, or quieter than others. Even for those who are talkative with friends eventually stop talking to mom and dad as they yearn for more independence. Try the following tips to jumpstart effective communication between parent and child:



## Avoid yes or no questions at all costs

The quickest way to end a conversation is to ask a question that can be answered in only one word! The same goes for any question that can be answered by saying “fine”, “good”, or “nothing”. Stick to open-ended questions that require a full sentence response.

## Talk about favorite topics and subjects

This involves listening to your child interact with friends or simply paying attention when helping with homework. Remember, that you don't have to do the homework instead of your child, but you need to help him or her with homework. In our [parental blog](#), you will find the right strategies for this. Find out what your kids love and ask about related topics that might be covered in school. For instance, if your kid likes to learn and read about wild animals, talk about science. Show them [online videos for kids](#) about penguins to widen their knowledge. Tell her that you remember enjoying learning about the food chain, predators, and prey, and ask what she has been learning about it in science class.

Observe sibling interactions. Are you a parent of multiples? Maybe you have two children with only a year or two difference. If so, take full advantage of listening to their after-

school conversations. Not only will you learn more about what is going on at school, but you can find out about their interests to start a positive dialogue.

### Don't respond to sarcasm or annoyances

Any parent hates it when kids roll their eyes or shoots off a snarky response to a question. Stay strong in the face of sarcasm and disdain! If parents are quick to discipline every little remark, children quickly shut down and actively avoid opening up entirely. The lesson here is to pick battles wisely, and to keep conversations positive, even after an eye roll or exasperated sigh.

### Stay open and remain available

At the end of the day, children must believe that their parents are approachable and available at all times. Kids are more likely to open up when parents are willing to engage at other times besides the dinner table or the car. To improve their willingness to share information about their day, be sure to be responsive whenever they have questions of their own.

### Don't be too quick to jump in to save the day

Most parents hate watching their children struggle, and it's tempting to try to jump in and try to fix any issue, big or small, immediately. However, like adults, sometimes kids just need somebody to listen. If they can trust that you will listen without judgement, they will be more likely to open up during discussion.

### Keep interactions positive and non-threatening

If possible, stay away from asking overtly negative questions. When you suspect your child is struggling, gently prompt your child to tell you more about what is going on. Be sure to do this in a way that isn't judgmental or condescending.

# Questions to Ask After School

As kids get older, parent child communication can be tricky, especially when it comes to picking the right questions to ask after school. Try these options to get them beyond “fine” and “good”:

- What was the best thing that happened today? It’s always best to start with the positive! This question shows that you truly care about your child’s happiness and the events that made him or her smile.
- What made you laugh today? This question can make you privy to your child’s social lives, or his or her interactions with the teacher. Not only will you get the day’s scoop, but you might get an interesting or funny story to share with your spouse!
- What was the hardest thing you had to do today? Chances are, your child will share information about a topic or subject he or she is struggling with. This question helps identify any problem-areas in both academics and with friends.
- Who did you play with at recess today? Use this question to gauge friendships and to get to know some of your child’s friends, especially those you have never met. Asking about playmates can also tip you off to any potential bullying issues or sources of negativity, should you notice something amiss with your child’s mood at any time.
- What was your favorite book you’ve read this week? While not a question, it does prompt kids to think about the events of school to tell you about something they enjoyed. From there, you can ask more about their reading, or offer to read a similar book together before bedtime.
- Tell me about something you can use a little help with at school. When parents ask children if they need any help, the most common response is “no”. But as humans, we all need a little help at times. One way to improve daily dialogue is make this apparent by rephrasing the question into a prompt to encourage more friendly and open sharing.



## Using Technology to Keep Tabs on Your Child's Progress

Naturally, kids are unable to fill you in about everything happening at school, and that includes a lot of information about their academic progress. When talking to them at the dinner table, don't expect to hear a detailed explanation of each assignment. Whether they're afraid of disappointing you over a low grade, or the fact that they lack that data to communicate their grades, it's important to remember that all parents have access to a wealth of information to bridge the gaps. For information you can't eek out of your children, don't forget to try the following steps:

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- Check your school district's parent portal or grade book electronically. Most of the time, you can see results as it unfolds, answering your own questions about your child's progress in any subject area or individual skill.
  - Contact the teacher for any issues or questions that arise. Many parents are afraid to open a line of communication with the one person that interacts with their kids for multiple hours each day! Most teachers are easily contactable at any time via email.
  - Use [educational apps for kids](#), whether at home, or in conjunction with school, to your advantage! For example, in Kids Academy Talented and Gifted Program, progress data can be tracked in the parent's account that includes detailed reports and feedback directly in the app. Check any educational app your family uses to see and track progress.
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Effective communication with children can be a challenging task, especially as kids get older and gain more independence away from parents at school. If you're like most parents, you might be frustrated with hearing your elementary student say "fine" or "good" when asked about school. Turn those one-word responses into an engaging dialogue following the above guidelines!

Ask open-ended questions and prompt kids to respond with sentences instead of one-liners. Above all, stay open, available, and positive, even when faced with the occasional eye roll or sarcasm. Parenting can be tricky but stick to these tips to keep the conversation rolling!

