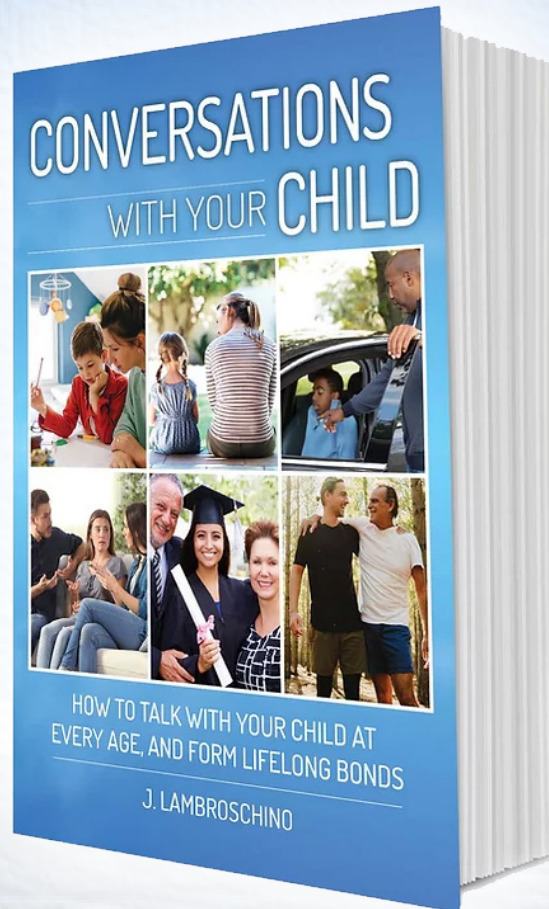


Conversations with Your Child



Introduction

Justine Lambroschino—Consistent, open communication for all ages as well as many other skills and responsibilities. I am thrilled with the opportunity to share this book with you. Copyright © 2022 by Justine Lambroschino. All rights reserved.

Conversations with Your Child

*How to Talk with Your Child
at Every Age and Form
Lifelong Bonds*

By J. Lambroschino

Conversations with Your Child
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Published by J. Lambroschino
Wareham, MA
jlamb51@comcast.net

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Introduction

The Gift, Your Presence: Listening, Talking, Connecting

*“Making the decision to have a child – it’s momentous.
It is to decide forever to have your heart go
walking around outside your body.”
—Elizabeth Stone*

Before parents become parents, they reflect on how their life will be once their child arrives. Some imagine a precious cherub climbing up on their laps and begging for a story. Others picture their child growing up to be a scholar, or a singer, or a star on the playing fields. All imagined family scenes include love and connection.

As the family evolves, the foundation for connection is communication. Home is a child’s first world. It is where children form skills to navigate life. Learning to communicate in the home is the beginning of learning to communicate with the world. The key to successful parenting is engaging in regular ongoing conversations with your children, during each stage of their life. As parents and children listen to each other and make a true connection, the potential for growth is limitless.

My hope is that if you are a parent choosing to read this book, you are seeking to create a home where living is not a guessing game or a struggle. Parenting can be accomplished in ways that do not leave parents exhausted, children unacknowledged, and home an unhappy place. Instead, parenting can be a joyful activity that continues to connect parent and child, heart to heart, throughout their lifetime together.

Because of the busyness of daily living, parents often find themselves overwhelmed. As a result, they may fail to carve out talking time with their child, losing out on the joy of witnessing their child’s development. They may be successful in chatting superficially but not in hearing the important issues in their child’s life. Conversations may become a one-way outburst of sharp demands from parent to child such as: clean up your room, finish your homework, put away that phone. Because the child is not being heard, they may give up, and by the time they reach their teen years, decide to “tune out” their parents and go it alone.

However you are communicating with your child now, it can improve by using this book as a guide. Based on observations and my experience as a family therapist, conversations help to make closer relationships. It is also grounded in lessons I learned in my own childhood, as well

as in my job as a mother and a grandmother.

Please note: throughout the book I refer to parents and families. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines a parent as one who begets or brings forth offspring or a person who brings up and cares for another; these are both noun definitions. As a verb, the definition of parent is: to be or act as the parent of a child/children. The state of being a parent and functioning as a parent had traditionally been a two-parent family where the dad is a male and the mom is the female, but that model has changed. Now 16% of American children live in blended families which may consist of multiple combinations of adults and children including two moms, two dads, friends, grandparents, and additional significant others. Today, 32% of children live in single parent homes. About 65% of children live in parent homes.¹

In this book, I focus on "traditional parenting" which has to do with a sense of stability. Loving and guiding a child through life is a privilege. Being present for your child is a steadfast commitment in traditional parenting.

Images of a traditional family are two adults who have chosen to raise their children intentionally according to their experience, beliefs, and value system. The parents chose to have children and believe it is their responsibility to raise their children with loving guidance that puts the best circumstance and outcome for the child first.

With traditional parenting, there is family cohesiveness, honesty, respect for all people, education, manners, hard work, healthy habits, a value system to follow, and parents who are responsive and available.

Each family creates its unique traditions by using or rejecting the values from their own childhood, religious teachings, research, life experience, and personal preferences. The special traditions of each family can be examined for additions and enhancement by the family as it evolves. No matter where you fall in the spectrum of parenting, it is my hope that you can benefit from the information provided here.

Cleaning up

This is part of the “Everyday conversations” section of the book.

Many parents neglect teaching children to clean up after themselves until they perceive their child is old enough to know how to do so. But by then, it may be harder, since it's easiest to instill long-term habits by beginning to teach a child as soon as he shows the physical ability to hold objects. It's also wise to consider your child's developmental stage and individual traits; for example, they may have an above-average attention span. Depending on your knowledge of your child, you can custom-tailor how you introduce this new skill. Around the age of 18 months to 2 years, during the Trust versus Mistrust developmental stage, introduce your child to the idea of putting toys away. If possible, designate a storage area and specific containers; even code the containers for items by color and size. It could start as a game, like throwing stuffed toys into a basket or just by designating a place where things go when play time ends. Your child may start picking up things with you or just throw stuff around. It's a beginning.

You can ignore any negative behavior by laughing and joining in with the child. As time goes on, the picking-up aspect of the desired action needs to become a predictable part of the activity.

Picking up can be accomplished on a loose scale of expectation, beginning with a time limit of 10 minutes and increasing as the child ages. For example, on a sick day, very little may be expected; on a day when a special guest is visiting, the expectation could be higher. The point is to keep it low-key because a habit is being formed that will improve with age, physical ability, and ownership of cherished belongings. This training aligns with seasons 1 and 2 of the Four Seasons of Parenting (see Chapter 5).

Age: 18 months to 2 years

(Parent notices child showing signs of tiredness: rubbing eyes, losing interest in toys, fussing, and other individual behaviors that indicate tiredness.)

Parent: Come on, Charlie, naptime is next. Let's line up the trucks and put the blocks in



the box and the animals in the basket. Look at this big basket. I think the stuffed animals can live here. Should we put Ruffie the dog in first?

(Pause.)

Child: Okay.

Parent: The basket is full of animals. Where should we put the blocks? This blue bin is perfect. Drop them in. Use both hands to get it done.

(Child starts enjoying throwing blocks in and gets a little wild.)

Child: I got more in than you, Mama!

Parent: Yes, you did. Good job!

(Child is fussing.)

Parent: Do you want to pick an animal to nap with you? We did a good job picking up, and now we're tired and need to rest.

Child: I want Bunny.

Parent: Here he is, sleeping in the basket. I'm sure he'd rather sleep with you. Naptime, Bunny.

Child: Naptime, Bunny.

Parent: Isn't it nice? Everything is in its place, put away, so we can rest.

Age: 4–5

Children this age can do more. The habit may already be in place from daycare or preschool, where they are also learning to pick up. All children are different and will engage in this activity differently. Mom or Dad will still need to cue the child. The time can vary, before meals, bedtime, etc. It is the parents' job to decide what behavior they want from their child.

Parent: Oh, boy, look at all the toys you've been playing with. We need to pick up now.

Child: No. I want to play more and finish this tower.

Parent: Okay. Five more minutes.

(Mom sets the timer. Five minutes pass. The timer beeps.)

Parent: Time's up. I will start over here; you start where you are.

(Children may comply or resist. Parents should just start a regular routine of picking up, with a smile, coaxing gently, ignoring the child's inaction.)

Parent: Come on, Charlie, line the trucks up on the shelves and put the blocks in the basket.

Picking up can be accomplished on a 0–10 perfect scale; for example, if all are tired, a minimal job may suffice; if all are highly motivated, it can become a work of fun and beauty.

Parent: Wow. That tower you built is awesome. Let's save it for Gramma to see tomorrow.

We can put the rest away.

(Child appears pleased.)

Child: Okay.

Age: 5–12

(Parent has finished laundry while talking to the child intermittently.)

Parent: I'm still working; having fun?

(Child is picking up room independently.)

Child: Almost done...

Understanding substance abuse conversation

This is part of the “Difficult conversations” section of the book.

If you suspect your child is experimenting with alcohol or drugs, ask her. With your history of conversations, your child will most likely talk to you about it. If the use or non-use of alcohol has been discussed in the context of family values, you may have already talked about this issue.

Listening at this stage requires patience and wisdom. Your child may be experimenting, if only mentally, with scary ideas and behaviors that are not what you want. This is the beauty of having a relationship with your child, who continues to talk with you because you have established the habit of conversation. Wait until your child asks for your opinion. Then, carefully express it.

The following are examples of what those conversations might look like.



Age: 6–10

Child: Mom, what are drugs?

Parent: What are you talking about? Who told you about drugs?

(Kids ask questions to shock their parents. All kids hear about drugs on TV, videos, news, social media, and while listening to people. Drug use can start early.)

Child: I heard some kids laughing and talking about them. What are they?

(Parents may feel compelled to ask, “What are the names of the children who were talking about this at school?” But it would be best to defer this question until later and respond to your own child’s question.)

Parent: The drugs that the kids were talking and laughing about are something they are not supposed to have. I’m really glad you asked me about this, and I want to talk with you about it. Drugs are something you swallow or smoke that make your body feel differently. The belief is that you will feel good, but it doesn’t always work that way.

Drugs are chemicals that come in several forms: pills, drinks, and plant products. You take them

into your body by swallowing, drinking, or smoking. The drugs can make your body feel different. Sometimes the feeling is good, but many times after taking drugs, the body gets sick or is damaged. It's not safe to put anything into your body that is unknown.

(This is what you are saying, but you want to keep the tone matter-of-fact and age appropriate and calm.)

Child: I don't know the kids very well. They were laughing loudly and stuff, so I heard them.

Parent: Okay. We'll talk about this some more soon. Let me know if you hear any more about this, and don't put anything into your mouth if you don't know what it is! I love you. Remember, you don't want to get sick.

(Talk about this again, more than once. Children forget easily. Repetition is necessary and important. As follows):

Parent: Hi, son. How are you doing at school? Any new friends?

Child: I'm doing okay. There are lots of new kids this year but we don't get to know them because of pandemic stuff. I know some of them; my best friends are still Jim, Harrison, and Seth.

Parent: It's too bad the boys can't stay over the weekend like before.

Child: We have a soccer game Saturday; outside playing with our masks on is good for something.

Parent: I'll talk to their parents. Mom told me you asked about drugs. Anything more about it?

Child: Sometimes, but not with my friends. I know who likes drugs. They have reputations.

Parent: Reputations!? That's a big word. What do you mean?

Child: No, older kids, and some kids my age know them. They talk crazy, go to the park at night when they aren't supposed to.

Parent: Sounds like your feelings are right. Steer clear. Do I know these kids?

Child: They are...

Don't push or react too strongly, or propose talking to their parents. It's important to realize your child could be wrong or even not telling you real names. Your child knows about what telling means at his age.

Watch and wait.

Age: 11-13

Parent: Hey, what's new today?

Child: Oh, you won't believe it. Tyler got caught with drugs today.

Parent: Really? What happened?

Child: The teacher caught him. He was video chatting with some girls and showed them a bag of weed to them.

Parent: Tyler. He's been in your class every year. Is he in trouble?

Child: I don't know. His parents came and got him. He was trying not to cry. The girls tattled on him. He was stupid showing off. I'd never do that.

Parent: Oh no? You'd never have weed, or you'd never show off to the girls?

Child: Mom, I'd never have weed! I don't do drugs. You and Dad would kill me! And I don't like girls. They talk too much.

Parent: Oh. Good. Be sure to tell Dad what happened. And by the way, I searched your room today.

Child: What?

Parent: I'm just teasing you now to let you know that I would if I thought you were using drugs or in trouble.

(It's important to let your child feel you have authority about substance use. Be sure this issue is clear. Things can happen that you never planned on. Our whole family needs to be aware and careful. Again, repetition is needed. The presence of drugs and alcohol in your child's environment is not going to disappear just because your child has been warned once.)

Age: 14-18

Parent: My darling son, I must let you know that I am aware that you have been driving after drinking, and your irritability of mood after these events is obvious to your father and me. We've had conversations in the past about this possible issue. And now it's becoming a safety problem for you and others on the road. I am giving you the opportunity to suggest a plan to address this.

Child: Mom, you are blowing this way out of proportion! I am not doing that. I have to go to work now. We can talk later.

Parent: For this very expected reply, I am letting you know that your privilege of driving your car has been suspended. Dad and I have taken the keys and license plates.

Child: What? You must be crazy. That's my car!

Parent: You are being quite disrespectful. Your father and I had a similar conversation with you a month ago, and you agreed to address this issue. You haven't. This is what we told you we would do. You have choices. Let us know what you choose to do.

Child: I choose to drive my car and go to work.

Parent: You can go to work if you like, but you cannot use the car.

Child: I'll be late.

Parent: Ride your bike or Uber.

Child: Okay, I will.

Later that day. . .

Child: Dad, do you know what Mom has done?

Parent: Yes. We let you know about this a month ago.

Child: But it's not true.

Parent: We took a urine test a month ago, and it showed alcohol and pot. We also addressed the behaviors you were exhibiting. Nothing has changed.

Child: I am telling you you're wrong.

Parent: If we're wrong, we can confirm it with a urine test now.

Child: No. My word is good.

Parent: I am sorry, son, but it isn't. We're going to have to inform your boss and the school if you don't agree to accepting some help and treatment.

Child: I'll run away. I can make it on my own.

Parent: I hope you don't do that, and we will try to stop you. Can we please talk this over?

Child: No.

Child does not come home; parents hear he is staying with some friends.

Two weeks later; by telephone. . .

Child: Hello, Mom and Dad. Please come and get me. I'm ready to talk.

This is a good outcome.

These parents set limits as soon as they discerned a problem and followed through.

Substance abuse requires treatment. There are multiple types of treatment; speaking with a therapist or treatment center will steer you to the right type of treatment for your child.

Addiction cannot be addressed within the family alone; outside help is needed because addiction is a family disease and all family members are affected by it. If the subject is uncomfortable for your child, seek help from a professional. If your child appears to be experimenting with friends who use substances, treatment will be needed. Parents need to educate themselves about this illness and examine their own attitudes about using alcohol and drugs. The ancient beliefs that addiction is a moral issue or a weakness have long been disproved. Resources for additional reading are provided in the References section.

About the Author



J. Lambroschino, followed up her twenty-two-year nursing career with service in the mental health profession for twenty-five-plus years. She enjoys working with families and individuals and specializes in women's transitions.

A resident of Falmouth, Massachusetts, for more than three decades, she loves sharing the natural beauty of Cape Cod with her encouraging husband of thirty years, and their dog Theo. She is also a proud parent of three daughters and one son, and grandparent to five beautiful grandchildren.

J. Lambroschino offers you an inviting, informative, and clear how-to manual to parent a child of any age. From

infancy to young adulthood, children learn to connect through talking. It starts with sounds, like crying. Your infant follows your eyes and lips as you speak and copies what you do. With amazement, you perceive the child's first words. Connection is established through conversation!

Meaningful, wise parenting happens through family conversations. They are the vehicle that connects family members and creates relationships so learning can occur. Yet, as children grow and mature, you can find yourself slipping into mostly a disciplinarian's role. The job of parenting involves more. It requires attention to complex situations and schedules. It also necessitates a dynamic process of frequent updates, clean outs, and new ideas, seeking help from other parents, professionals, many great books, and spiritual resources. Expert tools, along with personal reflection on your own experiences, can lead you to choose a parenting style and framework for your home.

Lambroschino breaks down the book's content into digestible bullets, lists of essentials, and motivational quotes. The most useful elements are her talking points and sample scripts that walk you through trouble spots and pinpoint basic responsibilities.

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