

Help! My Child Has Been Replaced by a Human Shrug!

The Simple Tricks That Get Kids Talking at Any Age

Your child climbs into the car after school, and you eagerly ask about their day. You're genuinely excited to see them.

The response? A mumbled "fine"... and that's it. Whether you're facing a tight-lipped five-year-old who's suddenly turned into a mime artist or a teenager who communicates exclusively in shoulder shrugs, cracking the code of kid communication can feel like trying to solve a Rubik's cube in the dark.

But here's a ray of hope: research from the *Harvard Family Research Project* reveals that persisting with open dialogue doesn't just improve today's family dynamic—it weaves stronger decision-making abilities into your children's future and creates family bonds that can weather any storm. In short, it's worth the effort to make conversations happen.

If you pause and think about it, though, you'll find that they usually do happen. Often more than we realise.

Understanding the Science Behind the Silence

While teenagers often cop the blame for becoming human clams, the truth is that children of all ages surf waves of uncommunicativeness. Our littlies might be wrestling with emotions bigger than their vocabulary can handle. Or they're tired and don't want to talk. Primary schoolers often retreat into quiet harbours when navigating the choppy waters of friendship dramas or classroom challenges.

For teenagers, there's fascinating brain science at play. The adolescent brain undergoes a dramatic renovation project—imagine trying to have a quiet chat while major construction work is happening upstairs. Their emotional responses are cranked up to eleven, while their ability to regulate these feelings is still very much a work in progress.

The truth is we often don't feel like talking either. When you walk into the house at the end of the day and your spouse or partner expectantly encourages you to "tell me about your day", do you open up and spill it all? If you're like most of us, you want to get in the door, get settled, and tick off a few things like dinner, washing, and getting kids to bed. And you're about ready to talk when you're lying horizontally in bed.

Making Connection Easier: Practical Strategies That Work

The good news? There are tried-and-true ways to pierce this bubble of silence, no matter your child—or no matter how you're feeling.

Create "Side-by-Side" Moments

Magic often happens when you're not eyeball-to-eyeball. For younger children, it might be while their hands are busy with Lego or when they're elbow-deep in craft glue. With older kids and teens, car rides

become confession booths on wheels, and dog walks transform into walking talk sessions. These moments, free from the spotlight of direct eye contact, often unlock the floodgates of conversation.

Master the Art of Active Listening

When your child does crack open the door to communication, resist the urge to burst through with solutions or life lessons. Instead, become their emotional echo: "That sounds really rough" or "I can hear how excited you are about this." This approach works whether you're validating a preschooler's theatrical meltdown over the wrong-coloured cup or a teenager's complex social algebra.

For younger children, physically coming down to their level can help them feel seen and heard. With teens, acknowledge their growing independence by treating them as the experts of their own experience—at least initially.

Make One-on-One Time Sacred

In the whirlwind of modern family life, individual connection time often gets sacrificed on the altar of busy schedules. But carving out regular one-on-one time—even just 10 precious minutes—can work magic. For little ones, it might be bedtime stories where you do all the silly voices or morning cuddles that start the day with connection. With older children, it could be a weekly hot chocolate date or shooting hoops in the driveway as the sun sets.

The Secret Ingredient?

Your undivided attention. Yes, that means letting your phone gather dust for a few minutes. This dedicated time whispers a powerful message: "In this crazy-busy world, you're worth pausing for."

Remember, nurturing open communication isn't about forcing conversations or expecting overnight miracles. It's about creating little pockets of safety where sharing feels as natural as breathing, whether your child is four or fourteen. Plant these seeds of connection consistently, water them with patience, and watch as they grow into something beautiful—a relationship that can withstand any season.



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