

Parents' Guide to the Practice of Spiritual Conversations

Try these 10 strategic listening skills for parents. We've added prompts to begin a conversation with your children but you could create your own topics. Practice the listening skill while your child responds to the prompt.

Adapted from Lacy Borgo's book "Spiritual Conversations with Children" and her videos.



"When children have a listening companion who hears, acknowledges, and encourages their early experiences with God, it creates a spiritual footprint that shapes their lives."

Full [playlist of videos](#) available on YouTube. (Each video is around 1-1½ minutes)

Adults tend to talk at children. Too often, we miss out on the means of grace in listening to children.

READ / DO / REFLECT

1. Listen with your whole body. Remove distractions, turn to the child talking, and give them your full attention.

- Conversation Prompt: Ask your child to tell a story of wonder. When have you experienced wonder or awe?

"Whole-self listening"

Still and attentive body and active verbal involvement in what is being shared.

"When we listen to [children] and mirror their words back to them, without commentary, we help them hear themselves."

"When we are fully present and open to another, we will be changed."

2. While listening, wait until your child stops speaking and they have finished their thought.

- Conversation Prompt: What are some things you are grateful for?

When listening to a child's response, practice the discipline of silence, as well as the art of clarifying questions like, "Can you say more about that?"

3. Use wonder words: Be curious about what each child shares.

- Conversation Prompt: Notice your surroundings. What is beautiful to you as you look, hear, taste, smell, or touch?

4. Repeat words that seem meaningful to each child as they talk. Listen to how they feel and reflect that back to them.

- Conversation Prompt: What is one thought that makes you smile?

5. Listen with an open heart, even if you don't like what is being said. Notice what's happening inside you as you listen.

Conversation Prompt: When was a time you helped someone or when someone helped you?

6. Acknowledge what your child has said: give a short paraphrase of what you heard. (Speaker/Listener Technique)

- Conversation Prompt: When was a time you felt God with you?

7. Practice safe touch: Ask if you can touch your child's shoulder or arm or hug them.

- Conversation Prompt: What do you like about yourself? What makes you special?

“When we create a space where a child can talk about their experience of God, we help to lay down a neurological footprint in the brain that helps the child to identify and therefore experience the Spirit in the future.”

“God cares deeply about children’s deepest desires. Their desires are a reflection of His longing for them.”

To encourage spiritual conversations, adults need to create a safe physical and spiritual space. For example, sitting on the floor helps an adult get on their child’s level where they might be more comfortable. Allow the child to lead the play and dialogue. This requires engaging questions, patience, and silence (things adults often have a hard time with!)

8. Empower and listen for the deepest longing: What is the longing or desire underneath the fear? Repeat it back to your child – “Am I hearing you say that you want _____?”

- Conversation Prompt: When was a time you felt scared or afraid?

9. Encourage and call out the good and true: Are you saying “_____?”

- Conversation Prompt: What does love look like or feel like to you?

10. Notice the threads: Listen for and notice the Fruit of the Spirit woven throughout their conversation.

Conversation Prompt: What is God like?

“We have to remember that [our children’s] relationship to God is theirs. And it is an invitation to us as adults to begin to ask the question, ‘Lord, how much do I actually trust you?’”

“When children are invited to listen and look for the movement of God in their life, it is a tangible reminder that they are not alone.”