

just wasn't listening? This point is especially critical for adept multi-taskers to understand. Just because you *can* read a magazine and check your email while listening to your son doesn't mean you *should*.

Periodically Summarize What You've Heard
Summarizing serves two purposes. It helps *you* to be sure that you are really understanding and it helps your partner by assuring *them* that you are really listening.

Be Loving

Sometimes the "sense" of a conversation long outlasts our recollection of its contents. God gave me a couple of incredible counselors during my high-school years. I can't presently recall a single line of their advice, but I can still see their loving faces and recall their gracious manners.

Of course, this is the most important part of being a good listener. If the love of Christ doesn't shine through your conversation, you have accomplished nothing (1 Cor. 13).

In a conversation, the litmus test of love often comes down to word choice. "Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones" (Prov. 16:24).

Laughter may be good medicine but so is intentional, genuine, patient, engaged and loving conversation.

¹ <http://www.worldmag.com/articles/16969>



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Capitalizing on Conversation:

Principles for Talking with Teens

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

If your verbal interactions with teens lack the intimacy of true conversation (or are too often characterized by friction), it would be good to ask the question, "How can we start to either open or re-open channels of significant conversation that are presently closed?"

Developing deep dialogue is easier said than done, especially in our day when conversation is often trivial or superficial. In fact, only in our day is it necessary to modify the word "conversation" with the adjective "meaningful."

World Magazine contributor Mindy Belz reminds us that,

"It used to be different. Conversation in mid-14th century Old French meant 'living together, having dealings with others,' a 'manner of conducting oneself in the world...' It implied intimacy

and also some friction... So intense was its connotation that from the 16th century conversation was used as a synonym for sexual intercourse; in the 18th century 'criminal conversation' was a legal term meaning adultery."¹

Of course Scripture's counsel holds

true beyond the parent-teen relationship. If we take seriously the fact that our words define us, we should all carefully consider how to improve our communication methods with everyone.

The following six considerations are essential for godly verbal exchange.

Be Intentional

While all of us have regretted speaking without some degree of planning, few things facilitate greater freedom than preparedness. What are some ways to be deliberate in communicating with others?



Pray for God's Leading in the Conversation
Many of us would pray before an important job interview or before a public speaking engagement that is testing our nerves. Conversations with our young people are no less important and are often infinitely more so.

Begin in a Non-Threatening Atmosphere
Realtors say that the three most important things about a property are location, location, location. This adage also applies to interpersonal dialogue. An afternoon walk to the grocery store or a casual game of hoops may be much more effective than trying to talk with your blurry-eyed son around the breakfast table.

Ask Open-Ended Questions
One-word answers do not make a conversation.

Proverbs 20:5 says, "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out." The hearts of teenagers are often some of the deepest wells. But carefully worded questions can have a lot of drawing power. Instead of asking, "How was lunch today?" ask, "What did you most like about lunch today?"

Beginning with topics that interest your teen may also prime the pump for a greater flow of heart-expression.

Try to Keep the Conversation on Track
When teenagers start to ramble (as we all do sometimes), ask pointed questions to re-focus the conversation. Not that one should take a domineering position in communicating with anyone on a lower rung of God's authority ladder, but given the difference in matur-

ity, adults bear most of the responsibility in facilitating an edifying conversation.

Operate through a "Gospel-Grid"
This doesn't mean that every sentence or even every conversation is directly about the cross. But it does mean that in all of our conversations, our main concern is for our teenagers to find comfort and strength in knowing God in Christ. When we approach conversations with a "Let-me-fix-it" mentality, we obscure the cross and often make things worse.

Be Genuine
In 2 Corinthians 2:17 Paul contrasts his speech with that of a peddler. In Paul's day as well as in ours, some peddlers or retailers would say or do anything to make a sale; they were anything but genuine. "On the contrary," says Paul in 2 Corinthians 2:17, "in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God." Sincere speech requires at least two things:

Appropriately Handle Awkward Turns
One of the risks of engaging in conversation is that you may hear more than you bargained for. We've heard sitcom parents tell their teens, "I don't even want to *know* about it." But in a *genuine* conversation, we *do* want to know about it. One of the surest ways of aborting a potentially fruitful talk is to berate the other person as soon as they cross our lines of acceptability. There is nothing more disingenuous than a Christian whose own sins always tend to recede in the face of others' (Cf. 2 Sam. 12:1-9; Matt. 7:3).

The best way to be a genuine conversation partner is to be a genuine sinner-saved-by-grace—even with one's children. Honest self-evaluation will help us resist the urge to constantly slip into correction mode. As we realize that the Holy Spirit is working within *us*, we will be more willing to approach every disagreeing thought with true grace.

Avoid Teen Jargon You're not Comfortable With
We've all used words we weren't natural to us. They rarely help and teenagers are particularly adept at spotting insincerity.

If "groovy" is how you describe something you like, then use it. The young person in front of you may giggle inside but you won't lose respect like you would by trying to copy his vocabulary.

Be Patient
It's been said that Job's friends were at their best behavior while they, "Sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him..." (Job. 2:13). Notwithstanding the short-comings in their words that followed, they teach us the need to be patient conversationalists. Here are a few ways to apply that principle when talking with teens.

Give Teenagers Enough Time to Talk
If it isn't a good time for a conversation, be honest and say so, but offer a

specific time to return to the conversation. If a young person really wants to talk, consider stopping what you're doing to converse. Time is precious. We should be sure we are using it for eternal gain.

Allow Teenagers Time to Find the Right Words
I know I get frustrated when people choose words for me, especially in an intellectually lopsided conversation. Young people have ever expanding vocabularies that shouldn't be squelched by impatience.

Don't Force a Conversation
Sometimes the timing just isn't right. Carefully and prayerfully select times to move the conversation beyond the routine. It is simply counter-productive to try to require someone who is out-of-sorts to participate in a conversation.

Be Engaged
To engage means to occupy the attention or efforts of a person. In conversational terms, this is simply, "In honor giving preference to one another" (Rom. 12:10). How can we do this?

If the love of Christ doesn't shine through your conversation you have accomplished nothing (1 Cor. 13).

Concentrate
Pay attention to every word your teenagers say and watch their faces for nonverbal cues. Don't worry if this feels unnatural at first; preferring them and what they are saying over your own interests takes work.

When is the last time that you felt like bailing out of a conversation because you had a sense that your partner