

Parenting Skills: Becoming An “Askable” Parent



As a parent, you’ve given great thought to your child’s health, education, and the kind of values that you want to instill in him or her, but how much thought have you given to your approachability as a parent?

How would you feel if your child made a terrible mistake because he felt as though he couldn’t come to you with a problem or question?

Some problems never make themselves known until our children let us in on the secret. If your child doesn’t feel comfortable talking to you about certain topics because of fear or embarrassment, then you’re left in the dark without any way to help.

“A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 75% of kids want more information about sexual topics.”

Children who aren’t getting information from their parents will search elsewhere for answers. Whenever your child seeks information or advice outside your home, your parenting influence is diminished and your child is left vulnerable to receiving misinformation or advice that cuts against your family’s values.

What is an “askable” parent?

An askable parent is one who presents an open and safe channel of communication for their child. Children of askable parents feel safe approaching and discussing difficult and/or embarrassing issues like sex, drug and alcohol usage, peer pressure, or relationship issues.

How to Become an Askable Parent?

Overcoming embarrassment. Parents often become unapproachable to their children because of their own embarrassment and/or discomfort in discussing certain issues. We are all products of our own upbringings - issues that weren’t okay to talk about with our own parents frequently become taboo for us as well.

While overcoming a natural reluctance to discuss difficult issues may be a challenge, it is important to remember that your child takes his cues from you. If you react in embarrassment to a particular topic, your child will probably be embarrassed as well. Rehearsing difficult subject matter before being put on the spot is a good way to calm potential embarrassment and/or stage fright.

Let’s be honest: some topics *are* embarrassing. It’s ok to acknowledge this to your child while reinforcing that she can come to you with any question or problem - *especially* if it’s something she finds to be personally embarrassing.

Arming yourself with

Information. Building a broad knowledge base will help to build your child’s confidence in their ability to confide in you.

When your child asks you a question that you don’t have the answer to, openly acknowledge that you can’t provide an immediate answer while promising to revisit the issue when you have better information.

Always follow up promptly to signal to your child that his or her concerns are important to you.

Honesty and Directness. Parents often worry about giving their children information that they are not old enough to process. A good rule of thumb if you’re not sure what is appropriate to discuss is to ask your child what he knows about certain topics and base your discussion on the answers he gives. Bottom line – if he’s hearing about it from his peers, it needs to be addressed.

Always be as forthright as possible with your child, not only with information, but also with the values and morals that guide your advice and decision making. When giving advice, it is helpful to include your reasoning so that your child can place your advice into greater context. The ultimate goal is for your child to be able to reason through difficult challenges by using the values and lessons that you have instilled in him as building blocks to come to healthy and responsible decisions without your direct guidance.

