



## Beyond ...

# "How Was Your Day?"

*Although we are keen to try and connect with our children and hear what's going on in their lives, as they get older, our questions are increasingly met with a single word answer, a sigh or an eye roll.*

I could not get my four year old to **stop** talking about his day. In fact he paused only for a breath (when absolutely necessary) and food, creating a background noise of details about who used all the small red lego pieces at his pre-school and whether Mrs Jordan had nice wrinkles on her eyes when she smiled and who got the most favoured sticker for demonstrating their sleep-skills at nap time and so on.

Fast forward ten years and the silence is palpable for many parents of teenagers. "How was your day?" is met with, at best, "Good" or "Okay", or the all-encompassing catch word of the last decade or so ... "Meh." What happened to my child who couldn't wait to fill me in on every detail? Well ... adolescence has a number of contributing factors that influence teen communication. One of them is the development of the pre frontal cortex (PFC) which is the part of the brain that (among many other things) controls **self regulation**.

This means that the younger child (with an immature PFC) basically doesn't know when to stop, doesn't pick up on cues that they're boring others and doesn't have a filter of what's inappropriate to share.

*(Just so you know, your child's Kindergarten or Junior Infants teacher knows waaaaay more about your family than you might be comfortable with!)*

It also means that as the PFC is developing for the teenager, their self-regulation gauge can swing too far the other way, and they find it difficult to determine what they're comfortable with sharing. This leads to teens being excruciatingly embarrassed over things that parents think are trivial and having a deep reluctance to discuss intimate, personal or emotional stuff; in a nutshell, being vulnerable.





# Two Ears, One Mouth

*Plan to be the person who speaks the least*

So what can we do with our mono-syllabic mini-adults? Firstly, I'm convinced that listening to their endlessly detailed stories when they're younger somehow gives us the **currency** to ask them questions when they're older. If you are dismissive when they're young, they might find it harder to trust you when they're older.



Secondly, **listen** without giving advice, critique or even opinion. (I know how hard it is, just really try your best.) If your teenager ventures to share an opinion with you about anything; school, a teacher, friends, politics, food, fashion, music, grandma, anything ... just listen and at the most do some reflective listening (repeating back to them what they're saying to show you've understood). For example, "So it sounds to me like you think Mr Chenowith was being cruel to you by making you read in front of the class. Is that right?"



**TIP:** For many kids, especially boys, sitting **next to them** is a far better dynamic for relaxing and opening up, than sitting face to face.

*(NOTE: You are not required to wear matching clothing!)*

This doesn't show you agree or disagree but it shows your son or daughter that they have been **heard** - an absolutely crucial foundation if you want ongoing communication, and if you want to create a culture where your children feel they can be vulnerable with you.

This doesn't mean that you're never allowed to have an opinion. But if you can model to your child what it means to listen with empathy and understanding, you are far

more likely to have a child who does the same for you when you need them to.

Try really hard to remember your own fourteen year old self. Try to respect the opinions of your child (regardless of how ridiculous they may seem to you). For example "That's a really interesting theory, darling. I never really thought of Rhianna as a UN ambassador using her songs as the constitutions for each country."



# The Goal

*Why are we even asking these questions in the first place?*



Over the page you'll find a guide of over 40 questions to ask your child, when you feel stuck for ideas, but you want to hear about their day.

Before you ask any questions, however, ask yourself this one: why am I asking this?

A genuine conversation about **what's important to them** is going to help our kids see that we care about their lives - not just peppering them with questions.

In the context of your questioning, think about ways you can help your children manage the experiences of their day (without giving advice or pushing your opinion) by helping them analyse their own and others' behaviour.

We want our kids to be resilient and solve their own problems, so be a sounding board, rather than the Spanish Inquisition and use these questioning ideas to introduce a culture of communication.

Developing that communication culture takes time and it is easier if it starts from a younger age, but don't be discouraged if your kids are already teenagers.

As parents we are in it for the long game, so intentional, regular moments of showing that you care and are interested will eventually seep into the mind of your teenager, whose brain is still reeling from the hormonal rollercoaster of adolescence.



Gently use a few ideas, adjust them to suit your context and above all, remember that you should be the person who speaks least .... even if that means there is a lot of silence. Make a cup of coffee, sort the newspapers, iron a shirt, but stay patient and wait for them to say, "Well there was this one thing ..."

# Question Collection

## Alternatives to "How was your day"

**Change the phrasing and context to suit you and your child. You could even get creative - print and chop up these pages and put them in a jar. You and your child could take turns answering a question for each other. Have fun with building connection and a safe culture of communication.**

- What made you smile today?
- Can you tell me an example of kindness you saw/showed?
- Was there an example of unkindness? How did you respond?
- Does everyone have a friend at recess?
- What was the book about that your teacher read?
- What's the word of the week?
- Did anyone do anything funny that made you laugh?
- Did anyone cry?
- What did you do that was creative?
- What is the most popular game at recess?
- What was the best thing that happened today?
- Did you help anyone today?
- Did you say "thank you" to anyone?



- Who did you sit with at lunch?
- Did you learn something you didn't understand?
- Who inspired you today?
- Did you ever feel unsafe?
- What is something you heard that surprised you?
- What is something you saw that made you think?
- Who did you play with today?
- Tell me something you know today that you didn't know yesterday.
- What is something that challenged you?
- Did you like your lunch?
- Rate your day on a scale from 1-10.
- Did anyone get in trouble today? Did you think it was fair?
- How were you brave today?
- What questions did you ask at school today?
- Tell us your top two things from the day.
- What are you looking forward to tomorrow?
- What are you reading?
- What was the hardest rule to follow today?
- If you could change one thing about your day, what would it be?



- Who did you share your snacks with at lunch?
- What made your teacher smile? What made her frown?
- What kind of person were you today?
- What made you feel happy?
- What made you feel proud?
- What made you feel loved?
- Did you learn any new words today?
- If you could switch seats with anyone in class, who would it be? And why?
- What is your least favourite part of the school grounds? Why?
- What is your favourite part of the school grounds? Why?
- If you switched places with your teacher tomorrow, what would you teach the class?

### **Get specific about people:**

- Did anyone play with Eve today?
- Did Mrs. Steiner go over that math test?
- Who did you sit next to on the bus?
- What did Mr. O'Reirdan talk about in social studies?
- How are you and Evan doing?
- What do your friends think about the substitute teacher?



- Was there anything really hard for you?
- How did the science experiment turn out?

## Get specific about events:

**Restrain yourself from offering judgement, and instead encouragement your child to analyse the situation and his/her own feelings.**

- Tell me what happened? (Before, during and after)
- Did you think it was fair?
- What would you have done if you were the student?
- What would you have done if you were the teacher/principal, etc?
- Was there anything you wished you had done?



page 7

## For older kids:

- Which teachers were in a good mood today? How could you tell?
- What was the peak and the pit of the day?
- What did you laugh at today?
- What was your least favourite part of the day?
- Was anyone in your class gone today?
- Did you like your lunch? Anything you'd like tomorrow?
- Do you feel prepared for your test?
- Was there a moment when you didn't understand something today?
- How were you creative today?
- Is there anything you'd like me or your Dad to help you with?
- Is there anything on your mind that you'd like to talk about?
- Anybody get on your nerves today?
- Teach me something I don't know.

These articles are meant to be a guide and not prescriptive. Each individual's personality, experience and context will make every situation different. I hope this has been helpful for yours.

Find out more about the long game of parenting or check out the full series of articles at the website: [www.loviused.com](http://www.loviused.com).

I love to get feedback, so feel free to comment in our safe & private Facebook group: **Flourish (Lovius Ed Consultancy)** or send me an email on [info.loviused@gmail.com](mailto:info.loviused@gmail.com).

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