

Fourteen Talks



Age Fourteen

The Essential Conversations
You Need to Have with Your Kids Before
They Start High School

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

Ground Rules

Middle school is full of hot topics, strong beliefs, and different family values—not to mention unique kids. For a more productive discussion, work hard to make your group a judgment-free zone. Have fun!

Icebreakers

- Were you surprised to read that parents need to learn new ways to talk to tweens (almost like acquiring a new language)?
 - What do you notice is hardest about talking to your child these days?
 - Which of the tips in Icard's bag of tricks seem most promising to you?
 - Did any of the general conversation-crashers feel familiar?
 - Which of these have derailed your recent attempts at connecting with your child?
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Chapter 4:

Talking About Your Parent-Child Relationship

- What resonated most with you in this chapter?
- Icard suggests that middle school is the time to make a shift from manager to assistant manager in your child's life. In what ways is your relationship with your tween evolving?
- Do you think they are getting to know you? What more could you share? What things might you be oversharing?
- Do some of the suggestions in this chapter for shifting your relationship with your tween differ from how you have viewed the parent-child relationship in the past?

Chapter 5:

Talking About Independence

- This chapter discusses independence not as “mature independence,” like kids doing their own laundry, but as incrementally exposing kids to more activities that require independent thinking and problem solving so that they learn how to gauge the safety of situations, read people's intentions, and even keep themselves company. Do you now have a new definition for “independence” when it comes to your tween/teen?
- In what ways does your tween/teen explore their world? What is your reaction?
- Do you find it easy to give your kids the space they need? Or do you find yourself wanting to step in?
- What do you find yourself saying “no” to? What parameters for independence do you set?

Chapter 6:

Talking About Changing Friendships

- Have you ever found yourself wrapped up in “middle school drama”? How did you feel?
- Have you ever shared your opinions of your child’s friends with your child? What was the reaction?
- Looking back on your own friendships as an adolescent, what were your experiences with the changing nature of friendships, especially the ones that faded over time?
- What resonated most with you in this chapter? And how do you plan to talk to your child about friendships going forward?

Chapter 7:

Talking About Creativity

- In what ways does your child show his or her creativity? In what ways do you show yours?
- Icard writes “Creativity and flexibility go hand in hand, while rigidity is the enemy of mental health.” How do you define “flexibility”?
- Did this chapter change your view of creativity? How?
- As a parent, how do you encourage creativity?
- What kinds of conversations about creativity would you now like to have with your tween/teen?

Chapter 8:

Talking About Taking Care of Yourself

- What self-care habits do you practice at home?
- Does your child have any self-care habits?
- Has your tween/teen had issues regarding hygiene or anxiety or nutrition? How have you approached these topics in the past?
- On some of the more complex issues, like vaping or self-harm, what suggestions resonated most with you? Do you now feel better prepared to have these conversations?

Chapter 9:

Talking About Fairness

- How has your perception of “fairness” evolved?
- Do you see examples of “Unfair Fever” in you tween or in their friends? Describe.
- In discussing unfair treatment of others, how can you encourage your child to speak up for someone else?
- When kids complain that life isn’t fair, it usually means they aren’t getting something they need. What actions might you take as a parent to get to the bottom of their feelings?

Chapter 10:

Talking About Technology

- Does your family have rules for how or when they use technology? How do you yourself use technology?
- Do you feel you are able to keep up with the changing nature of tech and social media?
- A Tech Personal Statement can be a good reminder of the rules regarding technology in your home. Are you going to suggest the idea to your family? What would your own statement include?
- Did this chapter make you reconsider the role of tech in your life and the life of your tween/teen? How do you view it now?

Chapter 11:

Talking About Criticism

- How might you empower your child when they feel stung by criticism?
- How could you redirect your child from caring too much about what others think of them?
- There's constructive and destructive criticism. What opportunities have come up/might come up where you can explain the differences to your child?
- When might your feedback as a parent be helpful to your kid? When might it not?
- What are some of your child's strengths that you can focus on?

Chapter 12:

Talking About Hard Work

- Did you use the questions (on page 181) to gain clarity on what constitutes "hard work" for you? What insights did you gain?
- Looking at the four types of motivation—internal positive, internal negative, external positive, external negative—what motivates you? Which type of motivation do you think most applies to your tween/teen?
- Has your kid experienced burnout? What brought it on? How did it manifest? What did you do?
- How have you and your child discussed the topics of perfectionism and failure?
- How do you balance hard work with enjoying life? Do you set that example for your child?

Chapter 13:

Talking About Money

- What are your own thoughts on money?
- Which tip on fostering healthy feelings about money resonated most with you? Why?
- What are some of the emotional aspects of money you would share with your child?
- How do you convey gratitude for the things you have? Do you think your child notices and mimics that?
- Are there instances where you might have been judgmental about the financial choices of your tweens/teens? How might you be more accepting—even if you don't always agree?

Chapter 14:

Talking About Sexuality

- How did you feel about this chapter: Glad to finally address it, or hoping it would be brief? Did any of your feelings about talking to kids about sex and intimacy change as you read it?
- What did you takeaway from Icard's discussion of "the talk"?
- When it comes to dating, Icard suggests examining your own fears. What are you most afraid of?
- How do/will you approach the topic of consent with your tween/teen, i.e., respecting others' boundaries and establishing their own?
- As your child forms or discovers their sexual or gender identity, what ways can you be sensitive and supportive?

Chapter 15:

Talking About Reputations

- After reading this chapter, are there any ways in which you now realize you may have sent mixed messages (i.e., "Who cares what other people think?" and "Don't do that! What will people think?") about your child's reputation? What were they? Why do you think there can be such dual perceptions?
- What are your thoughts on gossip? How do you handle gossip when your child shares it?
- What do you think about tweens and honesty? What workaround might you try to foster trust with your child?
- What will you tell your child about what makes a "good apology"?
- How would you handle learning your tween/teen shared texts and messages that risked harming their or someone else's reputation?

Chapter 16:

Talking About Impulsivity

- Icard says, "Impulsivity isn't a lack of decision making. It's a form of decision making." In what ways might impulsivity be a good thing?
- Do you see the two kinds of impulsivity—the kind that comes from an inability to delay gratification and the kind that comes from a drive to try new things—in your tween?
- The book makes an important distinction between guilt and shame: "Guilt is the feeling that you did something bad. Shame is the feeling that you are something bad. Guilt helps us become better, whereas shame paralyzes growth." With that in mind, can you name moments when you have steered your child towards guilt instead of shame for making a mistake? What worked? How did your tween respond?
- Icard states, "We all need a certain amount of impulsivity as well as restraint, and part of growing up is figuring out the right balance of each." How might you reward your child's spontaneity? How could you help them find ways to slow down their decision making?

Chapter 17:

Talking About Helping Others

- The author writes “Developing compassion for others starts with self-kindness.” How can you help steer your child to be kind to themselves?
- How do you teach empathy to your child?
- How do you foster grit and encourage your child to push through challenges?
- When it comes to feelings of gratitude, what will you do to make sure your child’s feelings of appreciation aren’t borne out of comparison to another’s misfortune?
- The holidays can send mixed messages about consumerism and giving back. What kinds of conversations can you have that will make it a holiday the whole family will enjoy?

Closing Question

Now that you’ve finished the book, which conversations are you most looking forward to having with your child? If you’ve been practicing as you read, what success stories can you share?

Continue the conversation online

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