

MANDI HART

**"LET'S
TALK"**



**Intentional Parenting Through Significant
Conversations. Includes 50 Great Questions,
EQ & More**

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INTRODUCTION

A family is more than just a group of individuals who share a legal or genetic bond - it's about relationships and dynamics therein. There isn't a 'one-size-fits-all' family. These primary relationships are the ones that we take through life, and they influence every other relationship. We learn about love, the way the world is, communication, our place on earth and our value from our family.

Unfortunately, these interactions and relationships are not what they should be. The breakdown in family structure is affecting all of us in some way. When your child is born, your authority over their lives is pretty high and dominant. I would go so far as to say that your influence is zero, minimal at best. Through the years and as they mature, your authority over their lives starts to decrease. If you build a stable relationship with your child, then when they reach adulthood, hopefully, they would listen to your counsel - not out of duty, but because they want to. One of your goals is to raise a healthy and whole adult who is influenced by your love and guidance because of the relationship you two share. That is a precious thing, worth protecting. And this book will guide you on your journey.

My aim with this book is to spark meaningful conversations in your home. I wrote it to guide you in bridging the gap, initiating interactions, to boost discipleship and build family relationships. When we communicate across the generations with one another, and we show love through our words and actions, we all win!

A dad who had recently completed a parenting course I ran had this to say: "I learned that I am not present enough with my children. Just the other day, I went and sat on the edge of my daughter's bed while she was busy on her phone. She looked at me and asked if I was ok? I replied that I am fine, but that I wanted to be with her. I just sat there."

This dad had tears in his eyes when he told me what happened next. "She put her phone down and asked me how my day at work went. She has never asked me that question before."

Time indeed is the currency of relationships in a home. May this book become a resource and tool in your home and family. Proverbs tells us that wise children are a blessing to their parents. Through your conversations, may you impart wisdom to your children and may they embrace learning.

Let's start talking...



HOW CAN YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN?

If we don't talk about various life issues with our kids, then they will form their own opinions. As children, we tend to believe what we are told (and the sources are not necessarily the right sources).

This e-book is here to guide you in starting to have those conversations with your children from a young age. Think about your childhood. How many of the stories you believed were actually true? Did you end up thinking something about a specific topic, but didn't have anyone to chat to?

Learning to have great conversations with your children from a young age not only boosts your connection with them, but they will benefit from it as well. Their lives will be enriched, and they will grow in strength, emotional intelligence and (hopefully) into a man or woman of God who will join you before the throne.

We cannot take our homes, our cars, our possessions or even achievements with us to heaven one day, but we can bring our family and friends that have called on the name of the Lord. That thought alone is a tremendously wonderful one. I long to share heaven with those I love.

HEART-TO-HEART

By the time we go to school, our tacit belief system is already in place. It develops during those formative years. Start early to reinforce how loved and cherished your children are.

At every age, you can have beautiful heart conversations with your children. A heart conversation is just this: it's a discussion that connects with your child's head and touches their heart. These discussions nourish the soul of your child. Our soul is made up of our mind, our will, and our emotions. Together, these form a unique part of who we are.

Heart-to-heart conversations do just that: they grow your relationship and draw you closer together. There are moments where you know you have hit the sweet spot in their lives, their eyes light up (or mist up), and you just know that it was a particular moment.

SEIZE THE MOMENT

Keep your eyes and ears open to everyday moments. Don't wait for the perfect time.

Use your everyday moments for a quick connection. There will never be an ideal time, so seize every opportunity as it presents itself - be it on the side of the sports field, at a movie or mall or just over a quick bit at the dinner table. As Robin Williams' in *Dead Poets Society* urged his students: "Carpe, carpe, carpe diem. Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary."

My daughter and I went through a tough time a few years back. We were both in an armed robbery in our home, and four men came in with knives late one night. The aftermath affected our entire family for a few years. One day she came up to me with tears in her eyes. "Mom, I only just realized what they could've done." I was busy cooking dinner at the time, but turned around and asked, "what do you mean, sweetheart?" "I just realized how those men could've hurt us and what could've happened," she sobbed. I switched off the stove and turned to her, drawing her into my arms. Together we cried and spoke about that night.

Now heart-to-heart conversations don't need to be all serious and emotional. They can be inspirational and encouraging too. Perhaps you have a son whose testosterone is starting to surge, and he just wants to know if he has what it takes. Do you or his dad need to have a moment to spur him on and tell him that can achieve the dream in his heart?

One day, I was driving home from school with my son, and I decided to talk to him about a movie that had recently been released that exploited women and sexuality. Teenagers need you to have shorter conversations with them if it's about sensitive issues (probably the length of two songs) and then keep it light again. Don't nag or preach to them. We had a chat about the topic and then carried on with another discussion. Our hearts connected even while driving home.

Boys often struggle to communicate in face to face conversations, but a sideways discussion seems less threatening and helps them to open up. They are more likely to share that way. Girls enjoy face-to-face conversations. Again, every child is unique. Become an expert study of your child and communicate in such a way that it speaks to their heart.

INITIATING GOOD COMMUNICATION

Heart-to-heart conversations impact your child's head and heart.

Children don't necessarily know how to initiate good communication with their parents. It's up to you to lead the way. Good communication involves two-way listening and responding. I liken it to a tennis game. I remember teaching my children that principle when they were very young. In a tennis match, one person hits the ball, the other waits for it and responds and then replies with his shot. That's like communication. When someone speaks, we listen: with our eyes, our ears, and our hearts.

As a parent, listen with all your senses when your child speaks. Take time to listen with empathy and pay attention to the non-verbal cues. Ask relevant, non-judgemental questions. Good communication impacts their head with information and their heart with love and attention.

5 Tips for initiating good communication:

1. Listen attentively - Practically, this means that sometimes you should put the phone down when your child is telling you something important. Encourage your children to do the same. Learn to be fully present. For example, imagine you are reading or working on your laptop at home, and your child enters your room and starts talking. There are times when you know it's not the usual 'mom, I'm hungry' talk but rather something more. Put what you are doing aside and turn to your child. Model attentive listening for your children.
2. Take a (mental) breath before you speak - This means thinking before you talk or respond. We teach our kids to 'look before they leap' and this is the same for initiating good communication. This involves listening and responding with empathy, context and considering what is best for the situation.
3. Do not interrupt the other person - Nobody likes to be interrupted, including your children. My kids struggled to learn not to interrupt. Teach your children how to interrupt courteously, but as a principle teach them how to honor the other person by not interrupting.
4. Keep on track - Children often get distracted (as do adults). Good communication involves sticking to the topics even if its a short conversation.
5. Use the right communication method - Sometimes I text my kids because that's the way they like to communicate and I get a good response. Sometimes, I talk face-to-face in a coffee shop or even while driving home from school on crucial topics. I have learned to be creative. Just before bed is a wonderful time to listen to what they have to say. Even writing notes speaks volumes. Be creative in your styles. Different types of circumstances or situations ask for various forms/methods.

From my book, Parenting with Courage, I write: "With older children, coach them to tune in to people's verbal and non-verbal cues and to respond accordingly. More than 50% of all communication is non-verbal (the remainder consists of what is said [7%] and the tone of voice [38%]). Teach your children how to recognize basic body language signs, tones of voice and a few facial expressions. For example, 'If your friend stands with her arms crossed and she's not cold she is probably wanting to shield herself from someone or a threatening situation.'"

DEVELOP EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND USE IT

In the past, scientists believed that an IQ score would determine one's success in life. In today's world, we know that without EQ, you cannot be successful in life—in leadership, relationships, social interactions all depend on an individual's EQ.

In an excerpt from my book, Parenting with Courage, I write:

It is interesting to note that we learn how to handle failure, trouble-some emotions, expectations and ideals, grief and loss and other components that make up our emotional IQ from our mothers.

“If your emotional abilities aren't in hand, if you don't have self-awareness, if you are not able to manage your distressing emotions, if you can't have empathy and have effective relationships, then no matter how smart you are, you are not going to get very far,”⁴ said Dr Daniel Goleman, a well-known researcher and author on leadership.

It is helpful to give your son or daughter emotional words to process what they are experiencing in their bodies, hearts and minds. This processing can start when they are very young, but if you haven't done that and your child is a teenager, it is not too late to have those conversations with them.

A wonderful tool to teach your child to process emotions is using the acronym RURU:

Recognize: Recognize the emotion that you are feeling.

Understand: Understand *why* you are feeling this way.

Regulate: Regulate the emotion—sum up the reasons, see it from both sides, calm down and think it through.

Use: Use the above three points to make an informed decision about how best to react.

EQ helps our children develop healthy relationships with others. It is linked to the ability to make suitable peer friendships and guides our children into a well-balanced outlook on life. I really think that one can learn how to be emotionally intelligent. Granted, some people find that it comes more naturally than others, but it is definitely a skill that can be learned.

Emotional intelligence has the ability to manage emotions. This includes controlling your own emotions and being able to cheer up or calm down another person. As parents we need this skill, but even more so, we need to teach our children this great life skill. I have used a range of emotions to teach my children about putting words to their feelings. These synonyms are a start to teaching your child words for what is really going on in their hearts.

Developing Emotional Intelligence in Your Children

Eric Jensen said, “There is no separation of mind and emotions; emotions, thinking, and learning are all linked.” Teach your children to identify the emotions they are feeling and the ability to name them. From a young age, draw or show them various facial expresses and encourage them to recognize the emotion expressed. For example, “I am feeling angry, sad, happy, excited, confused” and so forth. Encourage your children to recognize the feelings that arise as a result of the emotions they are experiencing.

KEEP THE ROUTINE FROM YOUNG

Heart to heart conversations is also likely to happen during the bedtime routine. Establish a bedtime routine when they are young, and they welcome your presence before they go to sleep and then keep it up.

Resist the urge to forgo those regular and intentional times for connecting with your teenager when they grow a little older. For example, make time to sit on the edge of their bed. Be comfortable with silence or just to be there. Let the conversation flow naturally, and sometimes they might just open up. My husband and I have had wonderful heart conversations with our children just before they go to sleep.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

1. START A CONVERSATION ABOUT JESUS EARLY ON.

Encourage questions and self-discovery about Jesus. Keep the conversation going about faith, Jesus and what it means to be a child of God.

A mother to six children recounted this story: “I have a strong-willed five-year-old. She has not been as tender to the gospel as my other children. As I was praying, I felt God say I shouldn’t be concerned, that she will come to him differently. Then, one evening she asked to have a shower instead of a bath. When I tucked her into bed, my little girl told me in the shower, God talked to her. He told her she doesn’t have to be afraid of snakes, that he will protect her, and she is his daughter. This is the first time she heard God speak to her!”

2. PICK YOUR TIMING WELL

With emotional intelligence, support your child’s questions. If your child is adopted, then sensitive and timely conversations are needed. One mother said, “We will be having the heart to heart conversations with our son pretty soon, as we have adopted him. We will be sharing his adoption story with him, answering any questions he may have, helping him work through his feelings.”

3. OPEN YOUR EYES TO OPPORTUNITIES

As you parent your children through their growing up years, keep your eyes open. How can you engage with them in the following areas? Are there any dialogues you can initiate in any of the following areas?

1. Their physical development
2. Emotional well-being
3. Mental growth
4. Spiritual formations
5. Interests, talents, dreams, and desires

4. COURAGE TO DISCUSS SENSITIVE AND DIFFICULT TOPICS

Another great dialogue is one of purity and sexuality. Use direct, honest and open communication about these topics. One mother said, “We will live in such a sex-saturated society that we must actively nourish their souls with the truth daily. A father’s love and daily affirmation are also desperately needed by our children.”

In an interview I had with Karel and Zoe Willems founders of iMe Contentware and the iMe Movement that teaches kids to live connected, yet protected (www.imemovement.co.za) we discussed a sensitive topic, porn:

How do you raise kids to say no to porn? In our 10 years of working with young people, we believe that parenting in the digital age is no easy task, but there are 3 key things that all parents should include in their parenting repertoire:

- 1) Break the silence. We are the first generation of parents that will need to talk to our kids (and by kids we mean as young as 8 years old) about the harmful effects of pornography on the brain, on society and on relationships. The more open our discussions, the more open our connections and the higher the chance that your kid will talk to you if they need help.
- 2) Be relentless at putting up the first line of defense. Giving your kid access without the necessary filtering software is looking for trouble. If you have a pair of eyes and access to the Internet, being exposed to pornography is a given. Our kids should know the dangers but also be protected at all costs.
- 3) And lastly, we should actively teach kids the power of accountability. The allure of the digital world is anonymity, but it comes at a cost as it keeps people in pornography addiction. We need to teach our kids the benefits of living with accountability.

5. HOW TO PROTECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD?

Don’t go around telling all and sundry what you have discussed with your children. No child likes to know that their deepest feelings, fears or thoughts have been shared with those around you.

Protect your relationship with your children. Show them that you are trustworthy and get their permission to share a story with your friends. This can be difficult especially for us mothers, but as they get into their late teens, your trust is worth its weight in gold.

6. ETERNAL PERSPECTIVES

Author and Pastor, Tim Keller has been known to say that, “The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

You want to have the one conversation that would lead them into sharing eternity with you. All the other discussions build on this. They develop with you showing them what Jesus is like, loving them into the Kingdom of God and raising them to follow Jesus for themselves. Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent." John 6:29

For many years I believed that to be a ‘good Christian’ I needed to follow a set of rules (some unspoken). There was this invisible line that I needed to cross to be close to Jesus and in the inner circle. These included, amongst others, ‘don’t drink, don’t smoke, don’t do drugs, don’t sleep around, don’t get a tattoo, don’t date, don’t kiss boys, attend plenty of church services and functions, don’t be friends with unbelievers.’

The problem was that with these set of rules, it made it very difficult to follow Jesus and it just perpetuated my false belief that love was based on performance. Now, translate that into parenting. Imagine, my surprise when I realized that I loved my son and my daughter, not because of what they did, but because of who I was to them. I was their mother, and they were my children. I loved them because they were my son and my daughter - not because of their good behavior or anything that they did or didn’t do. And, that’s how much God loves us. It’s in His nature to love, and because we are His children, He loves us.

Now, there is another way of looking at things. You take your everyday life. Your eating, sleeping, working, school, friendships, and relationships and you invite Jesus into every aspect of your family. You orientate your heart to Him, and you choose to follow Him and obey Him. Not out of law or because you have to, but because you want to and because you love Him.

John 14:21 (NLT) says, “Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

It comes down to love. So, as we raise our sons and daughters to follow Jesus, we encourage them to obey the Lord. We teach them how to hear His voice and how to follow what He says. We train them to orientate their hearts to Jesus and draw closer to Him in their thoughts, their hearts, their words, decisions, and actions. After all, we want them to develop their own relationship with the Lord, not one through us or for us.

Secure, secure, stable and resilient children know who they are (identity) and where they fit into this world (belonging). They need to know who they are in the context of your family and who they are in Christ. Secondly, they will come to understand how they fit into this world and where they belong.



GREAT WAYS TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS AS THEY GROW

Embrace every age and every season as you raise your child. Take time to enjoy your kids.

NEWBORN UNTIL 1 YEAR

Your role as a nurturer in those early days leads to you speaking life, hope, and purpose over your baby. Your child needs you to affirm his/her value, to speak words of love and care. Even though your newborn doesn't understand as you do, he will appreciate the tone and heart behind your words. Communication goes beyond words. Your hugs, your responses to your baby's cries and meeting his needs speaks more than you know.

Family discussions - discuss with your partner how you can show love to your newborn. Talk about how to nurture trust and build acceptance and care into your life. Tackle any personal issues that come up with love and grace.

ONE TO SIX YEARS OLD (OR THEREABOUTS)

The heart-to-heart conversations that you can have with your child are great foundational ones. During this teaching phase, you are establishing trust, communication and so much more. Your conversations with them are based on you helping them create words for feelings, teaching them how to problem solve and reminding them that they are loved. Find creative ways to show your son or daughter how much you love them.

Family discussions - discuss what your values are and how you can parent out of that place. Also, spend some time talking about what the non-negotiables are. You don't want to discipline every issue but instead, figure out what are the critical issues for you as a family.

SIX TO TWELVE YEARS OLD

Conversations start to become fun here. Your child still needs you to externalize values so that they can figure out what they really believe. As a teacher/trainer you will engage in age-appropriate conversations about all sorts of life issues.

Start to speak to them about potentially challenging societal problems. Heart-to-heart discussions are still more in concrete terms but moving towards using abstract terms. Become great at asking questions for context purposes.

A parent once told me this story of a child building lego one afternoon. He turned to his dad (who was reading a newspaper) and said, “Dad, how do you make babies?” The father launched into explaining how babies were made. The son pulled a face and said: “No, Dad! I meant, how do you make babies out of lego.”

Family discussions - talk about your hopes and dreams for the future. Become an expert study of your child. See what makes them come alive and encourage their natural gifts or talents. Remember, your child was created in God’s image, not yours. Remind them that there is nothing they can do to earn your love. Keep on with your bedtime routine of story-telling, bible-reading and praying.

TWELVE TO EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD

If you don’t speak to your teen about relevant life and societal issues, they won’t talk to you. Courageous parents talk to their children about tricky topics.

The impact of meaningful conversations at this age is profound. Your teen will start to internalize his/her values as well as the gospel. They need you to set clear expectations, and as your role changes to more of a coaching type of role, your conversations will probably take the form of asking the right questions.

This age group is exposed to an incredible amount of information, therefore, be unshockable as a parent. If you engage with them on all sorts of topics, then be prepared for some odd comments, weird insights, and strange questions. Practice in front of the mirror if you must, but keep your ability to engage with them open. Do your own research about social media, apps and current world-wide conversations affecting the lives of your teens. I really enjoy this age. It’s delightful and tricky, all at the same time.

Family discussions - As a parent, become brilliant at asking questions. Parent this stage with empathy and compassion - and a sense of humor.

TEEN COMMUNICATION TIP: Talk about tough issues for about the length of two songs and then carry on with life. Resist the temptation to lecture your teenager and keep the door open to future conversations.



WHAT KIND OF MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS CAN YOU HAVE WITH YOUR PRE-TEEN?

Your role as teacher/trainer during this stage leads you to have more intentional conversations with your preteen. In the world we live in, it is so very important to start and/or continue those meaningful chats with them. Keep on building on the foundation of trust, honour and kindness.

A few examples include:

1. Discipleship conversations including how to pray, talk to Jesus.
2. Have meaningful talks about how to treat the opposite sex, how to be a friend.
3. Engage with them about age appropriate conversations on sex, body changes, gender, their future, high schools and relationships.
4. Become a great study of your child. What body conversations do you need to talk to them about.
5. What emotional intelligence developments and mental growth developments should you talk to your kids about?
6. Affirm their value and how much you love them
7. Consider a family contract regarding technology and device usage limits.
8. Discuss who and what kind of people are 'safe' people and what to do you if you feel threatened or bullied.
9. Talk about puberty and body changes. Celebrate the changes with them.
10. Remind them that are loved and that there is nothing they can do to earn your love or to make you love them less (even though you have to discipline them).



WHAT KIND OF MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS CAN YOU HAVE WITH YOUR TEEN?

1. Faith talk - remind them who they are in Christ and that they were made for a purpose.
2. Remind them of your love for them
3. Engage with them about porn, sex, and gender.
4. Find special moments to talk about their future, their purpose for being alive, and their destiny.
5. Have the courage to bring up topics around anxiety, eating disorders, suicide, and more.
6. Discuss the movies they watch and social media or online platforms.
7. Gently discuss relationships and friendships.
8. Guide them into healthy self-care and so much more.
9. Encourage them to be mentored by someone who has similar values to you.
10. What about their future - stir gifts and future dreams in their hearts.



50 GREAT QUESTIONS TO ENCOURAGE SIGNIFICANT CONVERSATIONS IN YOUR HOME

Every conversation is an opportunity for discipleship.

These are fantastic conversation starters. Our tacit beliefs are established before we are 7 years old. This means that what we think about the world, about love, people, time and so much is already embedded within. But, this doesn't say that we give up. As parents, we engage with our children all through the years. We work at building a loving, trusting and healthy relationship. Where you spend your time, your money and with whom indicates where your values lie.

These conversation starters are here to help uncover and help shape specific values within your child. The other bonus is that you are opening up a two-way conversation and building relationship. What a win for the whole family. Give it a go!

50 fabulous questions to ignite a conversation:

1. What do you see yourself doing in 5 years? 10 years?
2. What do you do when you feel bored?
3. Who is your hero and why?
4. What music makes you particularly happy?
5. How do you handle stress?
6. What do you enjoy doing for fun?
7. What really makes you angry and why?
8. What makes you most afraid?
9. What makes you laugh?
10. What do you think of bullying?
11. Do you believe in soul mates and true love?
12. Have you thought about what career or job you want to have?

13. What are your thoughts on marriage?
14. Do you think of yourself as religious or spiritual?
15. Do you consider yourself more introverted or extroverted?
16. How important is family to you?
17. When you have free time what do you enjoy doing?
18. What motivates you the most?
19. Do you find it easy to make friends or difficult?
20. Do you feel like a responsible young adult?
21. If you could go back in time, what year would you travel to?
22. Do you have a role model?
23. What do you think about tattoos? Piercings?
24. As a parent do I ever embarrass you?
25. What are your favorite family traditions?
26. What qualities do you admire in other people?
27. How would you describe your own personality?
28. Do others kids in school cheat on their tests or assignments? What do you think about that?
29. Do you know kids at your school that smoke? What do you think about that?
30. Would you ever be worried about being addicted to drugs or alcohol? What do you think it means to be addicted?
31. What do you think happens when two people have sex?
32. What are you proud of yourself for?
33. What qualities would you look for in a potential partner?
34. Do you want to date? Do you feel ready to date?
35. What are your thoughts on marriage?
36. Do you have any pet peeves?
37. Is being fit and exercising important to you?
38. What do you think about the most during each day?

39. Do you think it's important to speak and understand other languages? Is there a language you want to learn?
40. How important do you think is physical appearance?
41. What do you think makes a good friend?
42. Do you think you have any bad habits?
43. Would you want to be famous?
44. Do things ever make you jealous? How do you handle those feelings?
45. Do you want to have kids one day?
46. If you won the lottery how would you spend the money?
47. Do you think you hold yourself back?
48. How do you want to be remembered?
49. Do you consider yourself a leader?
50. What would be your perfect day?



PERSONAL & FAMILY REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What would be great conversations you could initiate with your children?
2. In what ways, could you build a family and encourage communication in your home?
3. How could you practically teach your children about good communication?
4. What skills do you need to learn about?

Thank for you reading this book. I hope it encouraged you. I'd love to hear from you, please share your comments or questions with me at hello@mandihart.net

Please follow my blog and find more resources <http://www.mandihart.net>



ABOUT MANDI HART

Mandi is an author, speaker, and mother. She's written *Parenting with Courage* and regularly blogs on issues relating to families. She also speaks on various radio stations into parenting and living fearlessly. Having hosted many parenting courses, Mandi has a passion for encouraging healthy and whole families.

Mandi lives in Cape Town, South Africa is the mom of two teenagers and loves the nations of the world. She follows where Jesus leads. This has taken her and her husband into many countries.

She loves to spend time on the beach, being family and laughing at the antics of her two Scotties. She and her husband enjoy friends, good food and great coffee. Mandi is currently venturing into writing about overcoming fear. Keep your eye out for her new book in 2019.

<http://www.mandihart.net>