

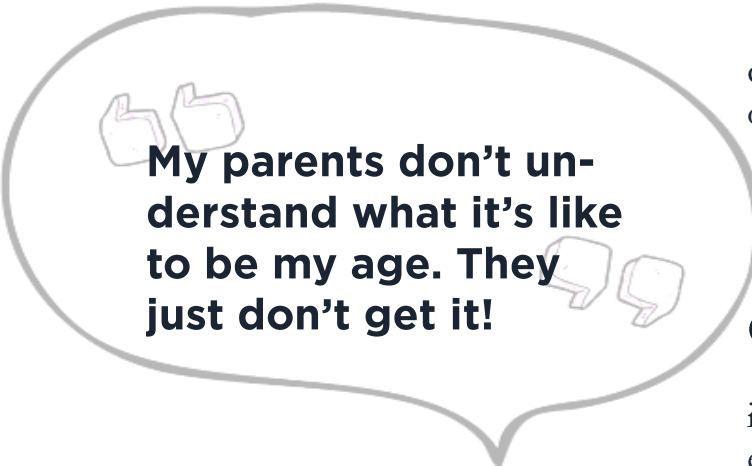
Speaking Their Language

Having meaningful conversations with your kids



**IDAHO
YOUTH
RANCH**[™]
Promising futures.

Breaking down the barriers of communication with your kids



My parents don't understand what it's like to be my age. They just don't get it!

Sound familiar? At the Idaho Youth Ranch, we hear these phrases often. And the truth is, they're true!

Changes in technology, the school day, and society at large have drastically changed the game for today's kids--making it difficult for parents to engage in meaningful conversations with their children about the topics that matter most.

How can you overcome these realities and have more meaningful conversations with your kids? Keep reading.

Accept the Dynamic

If you want to have more meaningful conversations with your child, the first step is understanding that the world has changed since you were a kid.

Changing technology has a huge impact on friendships, safety, and communication options for today's kids. Children--even at young ages--have more ways to communicate, more access to information--and a wide, open door to peer pressure and online bullying..

While it's important to understand how the world has changed since you were a kid, it's even more important to simply accept that it has.

Believe your child when he or she expresses

concern that you might not understand, instead of rolling your eyes or insisting that you were a kid once too. Take the opportunity to listen, learn, and focus on the issue at hand when you engage in conversation with your child.

Communicate at Their Level

When it comes to kids and communication, it's important to remember to "get on their level." Imagine speaking to a very young child: You'd crouch down to share a conversation instead of looming over him or her.

While your child might have grown a lot since those early days, they still need you to come to them, so to speak, to communicate.

One way to communicate at your child's level is simply by taking an interest in something that interests them--as opposed to trying to get them to come to you.

Does your son like to play Minecraft? Pull up a chair and participate. Does your daughter like vampire romance novels? Pick up a book and start reading.

This type of bonding doesn't need to be strictly regimented--and it doesn't need to have an agenda. In fact, it's typically better without one. As you bond and enjoy spending time together, the conversation will happen organically. Let it happen, and learn about your child's interests.

Try to remember that your child is a person--a different person at 8 than at 5, at 12 than 8, and at 16 than 12. You have to engage them differently as they grow and get to know them all over again.

So ask questions and get to know your child. Take them out on a "date" and take a look at the world through their eyes.

In doing so, you will build trust, respect, and

open communication with you and your child. You can do this at every age-- whether you are playing Legos on the floor or putting your makeup on together or shooting hoops in the backyard, you validating your child will build their self-esteem every time you show them how important they are.

Communicate Creatively

There's no "right" answer when it comes to the ways you communicate with your child.

It's okay to get creative and communicate in a way you're both comfortable. For example, does your child enjoy Snapchat? It might not be conventional, but it's a fun way to stay in touch throughout the day (during appropriate times at school, of course!) and remind your child that you're thinking of them. Sit-down chats can be intimidating or feel awkward to many kids. Finding ways to communicate in a fun, informal way can keep touchpoints with your kids and help both of you feel connected.

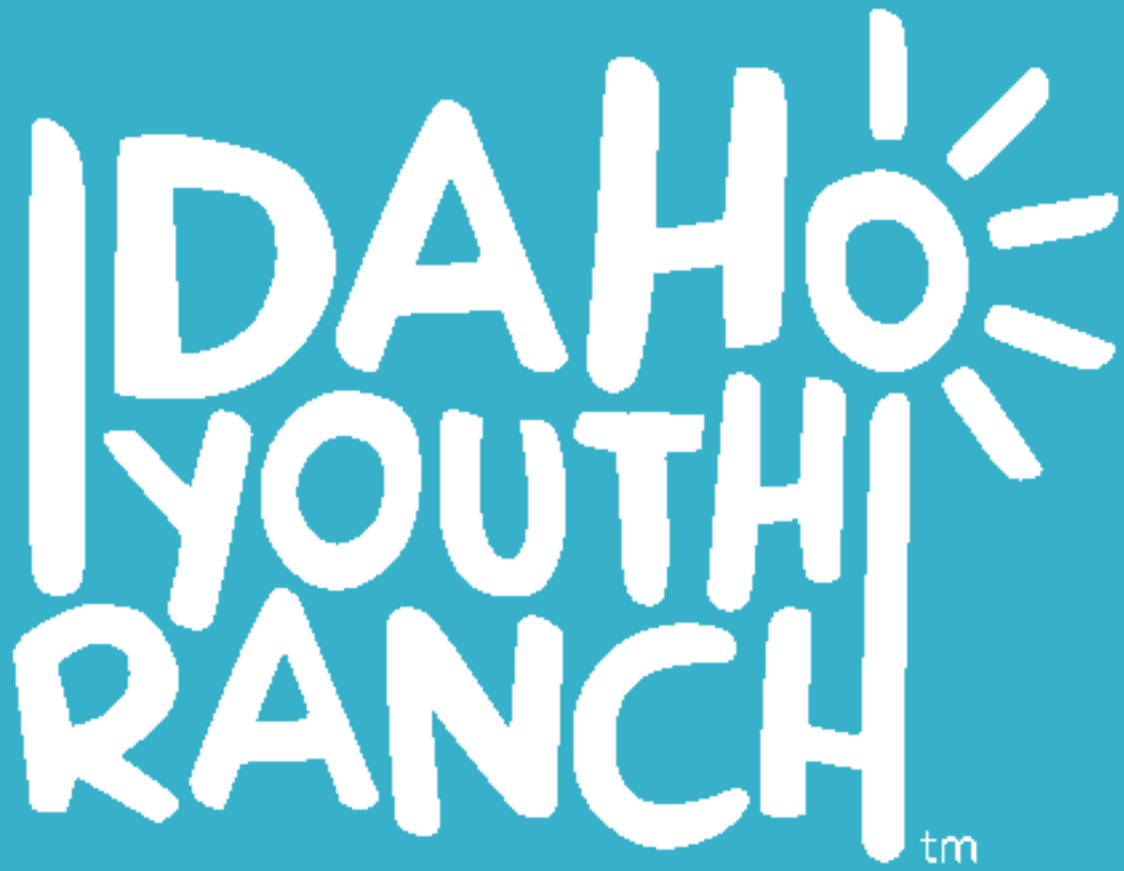
Step by Step to Success

Always bear in mind that you are laying down a road of communication one brick at a time. Drawn-out heart-to-hearts can be few and far between--and that's okay. Daily reminders that you care, the interest you take in your child's successes and interests, and the respect you show for their unique experience as a child through listening and understanding are the small steps that pave the way to meaningful, healthy, open lines of communication with your child.



7 tips for communicating with kids

- 1. Get Social:** Like it or not, your kids are probably using social media, so join the fun. It's more than just liking their pictures on Facebook, after all **after all**, 71 percent of teens are active on more than one social media platform.*
- 2. Game On:** 86 percent of teens play console video games (Xbox, PlayStation, etc.). Ask if you can play, too.
- 3. Imagine together:** If you have younger children, spending time playing with them helps develop their brains and self-esteem.
- 4. Eat Up:** Studies show that children who eat with their family at least 2-3 times per week are more likely to graduate from high school.
- 5. Go Outside:** Look for opportunities to go outside with your kids. Whether it is riding a bike, taking a walk, going to the gym, or gardening, doing something physical will help keep your child's attention from wandering back to a screen.
- 6. Homework Help:** Offer to help with their homework. Studies show the number one thing that stresses teens is homework and school (followed by parents' expectations). By offering help show that you are part of the solution.
- 7. Saying You're Proud:** When you have communication opportunities with your child, acknowledge their accomplishments. Enthusiasm on your part will encourage them to keep the lines of communication open.



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