



# Handy Handouts®

Free, educational handouts for teachers and parents\*

Number 398



## Why Won't My Child Talk About School – Even When I Ask Questions?

by Becky L. Spivey, M. Ed.

*The first reason could be the number of questions you are asking and when you are asking them!* After children spend six or more hours in school, why would they want to talk about it? Try not to be exasperated when they do not respond to your questions the way you want them to; it is not a rejection of you, but the subject. Give the topic of school a rest. Allow children to decompress from all the activities of the day. Let them have some "me" time. This might include a snack, a few minutes of TV or computer time, playtime outside, phone time, etc.



Getting children to talk about school (or other events they participate in away from you) requires being more specific with your questions. Give some thought as to what you really want to know rather than just making conversation. Do not ask broad, overwhelming questions or **any** questions unless you are prepared to listen attentively to the answers and have time to talk about them. Through their answers, you might find that your children are worried, anxious, unhappy, or concerned about certain aspects of their academics or peer relationships.

Parents should model the types of responses they are looking for. Talk about non-school topics first. Let them know what happened to you at your workplace or at home. When you model openness, children will usually follow suit. *"You will never believe what happened to me on the way to work this morning (after you left for school this morning),"* etc.

Give social/verbal cues to your children and their friends as they talk openly with each other in the car or in your home to let them know you are listening and paying attention, especially when you cannot make direct eye contact (while driving, cooking, shopping). Listening will make you aware of situations they may be facing.

With older children, do not be quick to offer solutions to problems they might be sharing among themselves. Sometimes just 'thinking out loud' or venting is all they need to feel better. Be quiet and let them talk. Offer your advice if, and when, they ask for it. If you feel like you must interject, offer words of encouragement or confirmation. *"Sounds like that was a good plan; sounds like you are all having a great time at school; that was brave of all of you to try."* These types of responses allow you to enter their conversation without putting them on the defensive. If children are obviously excluding you by talking softly, do not butt in. As adults, we do not always appreciate someone interjecting into our conversations.

**Direct your questions or use target statements to get information that is more specific. Instead of asking, "How was school today?" you might say...**

Tell me something funny that happened at school today. Tell me something you learned today that you didn't know already.

How is this school year/teacher different from last year?

What did the teacher read during story time? Tell me about it.

What was your favorite part of the day?

What kinds of games did you play at recess?

Name some people you played games with at recess.

Tell me four kids who sat closest to you at lunch.

What do your friends bring to school for lunch?

What are some foods you wish the cafeteria would serve?

What do you like about Ms./Mr. Teacher?

Tell me some things you have learned about Ms./Mr. Teacher.

What are some of your classroom rules?

Which classroom rules are hard for you to follow? Why?

What kinds of rules would you make for the class if you were the teacher?

What is the first thing you do when you get to your classroom? Next? And then?

What do you like about your schedule?

How would you change your schedule if you could?

Was there anything you needed at school today but did not have?

Have you made some new friends? What are their names?

Tell me about your favorite classmates.

Which classmates would you like to get to know better?

What did you think about today's test? What was the easiest/most difficult part?

What was the easiest/hardest thing your teacher asked you to do in class today?

**Some children experience more negative social interactions during the less structured times of the school day, such as recess, lunch, and during transitions. Asking questions specifically about these times will give you the best information on their social circumstances.**

Why do you look so sad (angry, upset, confused)? What happened?

Take some time to calm down, and then you can think about what you can do about \_\_\_\_\_. Follow up with, "How did your new strategies/plans work?"

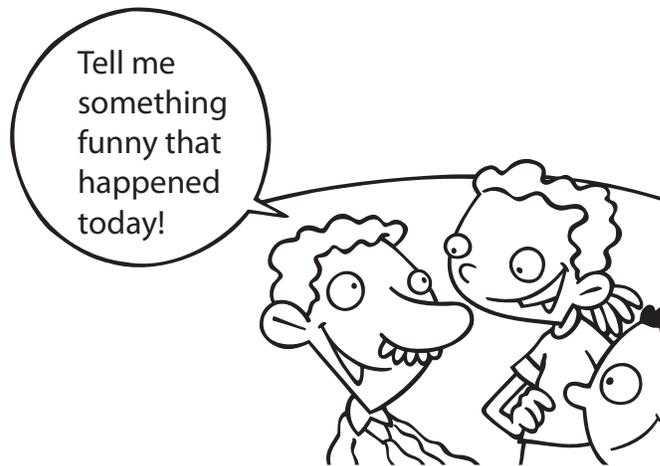
Is there anything I can do to help you with \_\_\_\_\_?

**Sometimes making comments is better than asking lots of questions. Questions raise children's defenses. Comments serve as an invitation that will encourage children to talk and let them know you are not only interested, but also concerned.**

I am sorry that happened. I know you are disappointed.

I know you worked hard on that project; you did your best, and that's what matters most.

You will get better and better at managing your time and class schedule as you have more practice.



#### Resources

Artemenko, Sherry. Parents' Choice – *Tips to Get Your Child to Talk About Her School Day*. Retrieved online November 20, 2013 from [http://www.parentschoice.org/article.cfm?art\\_id=357&the\\_page=consider\\_this](http://www.parentschoice.org/article.cfm?art_id=357&the_page=consider_this)

Public Broadcasting Service. *Understanding Each Other*. Retrieved online November 19, 2013 from <http://www.pbs.org/parents/education/going-to-school/talking-with-kids-about-school/understanding-each-other/>

ThrivingFamily.com . 2012. *After-school Talking Prompts*. Retrieved online November 3, 2013 from <http://www.thrivingfamily.com/Features/Web/2012/www.thrivingfamily.com/~media/Thriving/1-articles/2012/after-school-talks.pdf>

### Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit [www.superduperinc.com](http://www.superduperinc.com) and type in the **item name or number in our search engine**. Click the links below to see the product descriptions.

*Social Skills Chipper Chat*  
[Item #CC-88](#)

*Cool in School*  
[Item #GB-362](#)

*Simply Social at School*  
[Item #BK-371](#)

*What Do You Say...What Do You Do...At School?*  
[Item #GB-241](#)