



Staying Connected with Your Kids

By Michelle Derrig

Staying connected with your kids sounds easy enough, doesn't it? But with the crazy demands of modern-day life, combined with children that mostly respond to queries about their day in monosyllables, we sometimes find that we are only skimming the surface and are not actually aware of what's really going on in their lives. Sadly, this can mean we might miss the warning signs when something is amiss.

So what are some practical tips to make sure that this doesn't happen? How can we nurture a relationship with our children where they will be confident sharing their problems or concerns?

Firstly, it is important to **check-in daily** with our children and ask them about their day. However, simply asking them 'how was school' will rarely suffice, as general questions tend to lead to general responses. To encourage your children to give details about their day, try instead to **ask specific questions**. If your school or daycare use a digital portfolio, you can ask them about a specific activity or event. Alternatively, you could ask 'what was the best thing that happened today' and

A graphic featuring the words "Stay connected" in a cursive, handwritten font. The text is centered within a light gray circular background that has a subtle, textured pattern.

then "what was the worst thing that happened?" you'll be amazed at the things you find out.

It's not just what you ask that matters, but when you ask it. Utilise the time in the car to initiate conversation (yes when they are strapped in and can't run away); do your best to have family dinners around the table as often as possible; and the best one of all, ask them about their day right before bed – I can guarantee that all of the sudden there will be five different things they need to tell you in an attempt to delay bedtime (as tired as you are at this point in the day, try to embrace the moment).

If you have more than one child, it's also important that you **have one-on-one time** with each of them. This can be as simple as putting on a movie for their siblings and letting them choose an activity to play with mum or dad – an hour of Lego building, playing dress-ups or kicking the soccer ball can help them feel valued as an individual and provide a platform for you to learn more about what's going on in their little lives. Alternatively, you might make a morning or afternoon of it and take them out to enjoy a special outing together.

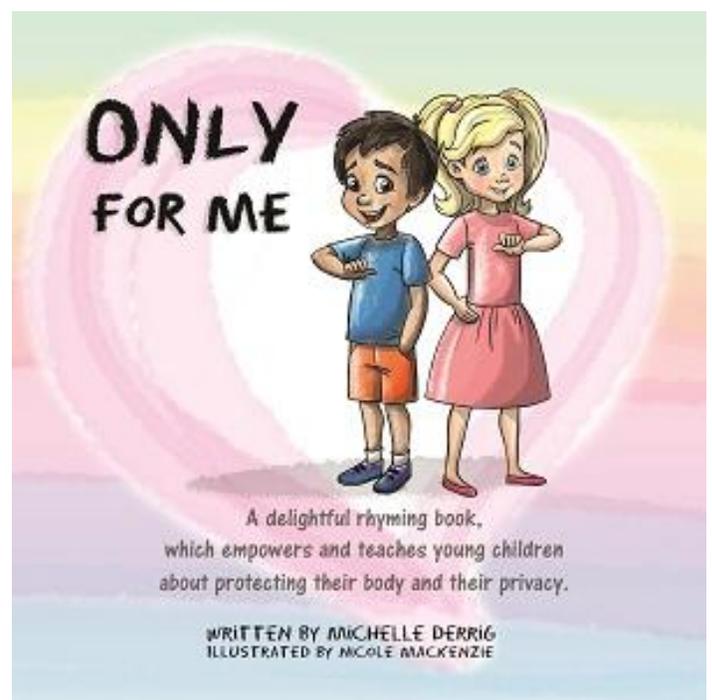
The final tip is for those parents who have a child who is reserved or withdrawn, to **provide them with an alternative means to communicate**. When my daughter was about eight years of age she was having trouble with some of the kids at school. Unfortunately, I had no idea what was going on until one of the other mums rang to tell me. I realised then that I had to give her another way to communicate with me, as she found it difficult to talk about what was happening at school. My solution was, what I termed a '**pillow book**'.

The **pillow book** was a small notebook that I left under her pillow one night. Inside was a message reminding her much I loved her and letting her know, that if it was too tricky to talk to me about what was going on, she could write about it in the notebook and then leave it under my pillow.

It worked beautifully as she now had a way to communicate her troubles without feeling so overwhelmed. (If your child is too young to read and write, you could use a similar idea, but instead

suggest that they draw pictures about their day, until they are old enough to write about it).

In summary, remember that in the busyness of modern-day life, **the most important gifts you can give your child are your time and attention**. So make connecting with your child a top priority today and reassure them, that you are there for them no matter what and always ready to listen.



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