

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, active listening, conversation starters

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens

Metadescription- In the first part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts explain how teachers can get their students to open up about their days beyond close-ended conversation.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #1

Rather than “good” or “fine,” how do you get children to open up about their school day?

K-3rd Grade

If you don't want a closed-ended answer (“Fine,” “No,” “Yes,” “I don't know”), avoid asking children close-ended, generalized questions about their school day – especially ones like, “How was your day?” Instead, ask them to share stories, events and even a “wish list” about their day. Use questions like:

- “What do you wish would have happened at school today?”
- “What was the funniest thing that happened at school today?”
- “Tell me what caused you the most anxiety today.”

These types of questions will lead to follow-up questions that help reveal to you your child's school interactions, both good and bad. It is also important to listen without judgment.

4th-8th Grade

First of all, kids dislike being asked questions like, “Tell me about your day” or “How is your day going?” This is especially true if there's been a history of trouble at school. It kind of sets them up, knowing that people are looking for problems or trouble. So instead of asking questions like that, I would encourage teachers to first share a bit about their day and some of the ups and downs. Then, let silence do its job, be attentive and listen, and see what students come up with. Most likely they'll be willing to share, too. Also, timing is really important. Some kids might not be ready or willing to share during certain parts of the day. Get to know your students and when they are most likely to be talkative and open.

9-12 (Teens)

Start this conversation when your kids are young so communication is commonplace and expected. Just as the more you get to know a friend or co-worker, it's easier to talk with your teen if you are in the habit of conversing with each other.

Ask open-ended questions. If you ask a yes or no question, you are likely to get a grunt or if you are lucky, a simple "Yes" or "No" answer back. Get creative in your questions and have fun with it. Some examples of open-ended questions are:

- *What is the coolest thing you learned today?*
- *Tell me what the latest scoop is on campus.*

Model good communication skills by opening up about your day. Share something funny, bring up an interesting piece of current news or connect with your teen on a common interest. If you know little or nothing about the sports team or club your teen participates in, educate yourself, ask questions about it and get excited with your child. Your teen might start offering unsolicited conversations if you make this a habit. These conversations will give you and your teen opportunities to talk about things going on in life outside of the family, problem solve situations together and work on relationship building.

Finally, timing is everything. A barrage of questions right after school or in the middle of homework will likely be met with annoyance. Let your kids settle as they have had at least a 7-hour work day in school and even more if they are involved in sports or activities. Instead, give your teen a hug, welcome them home or make them a snack. Once your child has a chance to unwind, they'll be much more receptive to talking.

Laura Kelley, Boys Town National Hotline Crisis Counselor

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, social skills, school and communication, school struggles, active listening

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens, Understanding Behavior

Metadescription- In the second part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts explain how teachers can identify signs that their students are having a bad day.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys

Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #2

What signs stand out to teachers in the classroom when students are having a bad day?

K-3rd Grade

When children are having a bad school day, an observant teacher can see signs right away when they enter the classroom. Early warning signs may come in the form of “rumbling” behaviors. These are behaviors that are more subtle and not like the child’s normal behaviors. For example, when a child who usually responds to you when you greet the child does not respond back, or a student who usually participates in class lays her head down on the desk. Calmly and quietly address rumbling behaviors as soon as you observe them. When you address the behavior immediately it reduces the chances of it getting worse and spiraling out of control.

4th-8th Grade

Most teachers are going to know this already by noticing changes in student behavior. This means there are fundamental areas students usually shine in that they are now struggling with. Here are some examples of signs to look for:

- A student who’s usually social is now mostly quiet.
- A student who usually has a brighter, upbeat affect now appears downcast and disengaged with others and in the classroom.
- A student has unusual changes in mood or is even just more moody in general.
- A student’s physical appearance begins to deteriorate in uncharacteristic ways (wearing the same clothes for days, poor hygiene, etc.).
- A student begins to isolate and turn inward.
- A student is more sensitive and reactive to things you or others say and do.
- A student has changes in appetite.
- A student starts picking on or bullying others when ordinarily they don’t do that.

All of these examples are changes in what I like to call the “fundamentals” – or ways students normally behave that are “off” or different that day.

9-12 (Teens)

Multiple absences

Tardy

Tired (head on desk, yawning)
Facial expressions (angry, sad)
Crying/emotional
Poor hygiene and/or grooming
Wearing same clothes
Not prepared for class
Don't participate or unusually quiet
Lack of focus
Plummeting grades
On phone/headphones in
Negative verbal comments
Behavior changes (acting out, out of sorts, abnormal behavior)
Outbursts
Aggressive behavior
Asking to leave class
Isolating from others
Disengaging
Suspicion of substance abuse
Risky behaviors
Somatic complaints

Julie Bloomindale, Boys Town National Hotline Supervisor

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, anxiety, behavioral health, school struggles, mental health

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens, Stress, Anxiety, Mental Health

Metadescription- In the third part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts share tips for how teachers can recognize stress and anxiety in their students.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #3

What tips would you give to teachers to recognize stress and anxiety in their students?

K-3rd Grade

A key is to know how the child normally behaves. A noticeable difference in a child's behavior may indicate there is a problem. Keep in mind every child is different and their responses to stress will be different. When children are stressed or anxious, their behaviors may look different from how adults react to stress. Some children giggle when they feel uncomfortable, others are instantly angry at everything and some children withdraw and isolate themselves. You should ask for help from the school psychologist if you have concerns.

4th-8th Grade

Be on the lookout for changes in the fundamentals of how a student usually behaves. One huge sign is focus, meaning a student seems more distracted than usual. Other signs to look for include:

- change in academic performance
- increase in irritability, anger or reactivity
- not completing tasks or assignments
- being withdrawn or tearful
- being lethargic or fatigued (likely from lack of sleep)
- leaving the classroom, rises in passes to the bathroom or requests to go to the nurse's office.

All these are sudden changes in behavior and performance that signal stress and anxiety might be a problem for a student. Once detected, you can talk to the student or the child's parents to help resolve or lessen what is troubling the student.

9-12 (Teens)

When teachers accept the responsibility of preparing students for their futures, they truly fulfill a position that encompasses far more than developing knowledge in subject matter. Many students today are faced with issues far beyond the classroom and academic pressures that can cause them great stress and anxiety. Some tell-tale signs a teen might be struggling can include:

- A student begins isolating. For example, instead of sitting and interacting with others as usual, a student might withdraw, become quiet and seem distracted.
- A student begins turning in assignments late or not at all when in the past they been well done and handed in on time.
- A student feels the need to take frequent breaks. It may almost seem they are escaping the structure of the classroom or are physically ill.
- A student's body language – e.g., reluctance to give eye-contact or a posture that appears tired and weak.
- Sometimes self-care and hygiene are neglected.

- Emotions are very near the surface as evidenced by crying easily, angering quickly and over-reacting to situations.

Catching signs of distress as early as possible is a key to helping teens get back on the right path.

Pat Thomas, Boys Town National Hotline Crisis Counselor

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, conversation starters, active listening, healthy relationships

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens

Metadescription- In the fourth part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts discuss how teachers can build and cultivate trusting relationships with their students.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #4

Because it's important for every child to have an adult to talk with, when it comes to building relationships and forming trust between a teen and an adult, what tips do you have to cultivate that relationship?

K-3rd Grade

Building meaningful relationships in your classroom is based on time, trust and mutual respect. You may not be able to cultivate a relationship with every child in your classroom because personalities play a part in who will or will not gravitate to you. You can, however, consistently build understanding, empathy and convey genuine care with each student by simply noticing them and acknowledging their efforts.

4th-8th Grade

Adults are often too quick to jump in with answers, to try to solve problems and to give advice to kids. But we get farther faster if we can be patient, listen, validate the child's feelings and let them do the talking. A good approach to building relationships is to let silence provide an opportunity or a platform for students to express themselves. So, instead of jumping in to try to solve

problems, give students an opportunity to get to know you and come to trust you and your opinion.

Another good way to build rapport is to discover and talk about common interests like music, sports, books or other subjects or activities you both might be interested in.

Finally, it's important to be genuine and authentic. Sometimes we want to put on our adult hat (teacher, coach, parent, etc.) when really what kids want and need is somebody to be authentic with them. They are pretty good at spotting somebody who's not being genuine and that can really hinder your relationship.

9-12 (Teens)

A teen needs someone to listen and show genuine concern. It is easy to get in the role of instructing, redirecting, teaching and coaching. Slow down and listen. As your child gets older, they will want to bounce ideas off of you, ask questions or vent about something. Engage in active listening by dropping everything to talk, giving eye contact and nodding your head. You might need to provide empathy, prompt with questions to help your teen practice problem solving or even share how a decision you made in the past affected a situation.

Be honest and be yourself. A key element in any healthy relationship is honesty. Do not try to be someone you are not just to connect with a teen. You can be different but still connect. Share something about yourself. Give the youth honest answers even if it's not what they want to hear.

Be consistent. If you allow your class to be extremely loud one day but then lecture or remove privileges from teens for that same behavior the next day, they will not know what to expect from you. Consistency makes how you relate with teens more predictable which makes them feel more secure with you.

Guide without judgment. Questions like "What can you do next time so that does not happen again?" or "How do you think you will handle this next week?" instead of "Why did you do such a dumb thing?" allow teens to think through how they need to act next time. Part of being a teenager is making mistakes. Guide, but also love kids through all of it. You can do this by teaching and helping with problem solving skills. A teen does not have the life experience or fully developed brain yet that's helpful in making good judgments.

Laura Kelley, Boys Town National Hotline Crisis Counselor

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, conversation starters, active listening, coping skills, communication skills

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens, crisis, coping skills, kids and teens in crisis

Metadescription- In the fifth part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts share tips for how teachers can address concerns about students in crisis who struggle to talk about what's going on.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #5

Do you have any tips for teachers with concerns about certain students who may be struggling with talking about what's going on?

K-3rd Grade

When children are struggling to talk about their feelings, it is important not to press them to share before they feel they can trust you. Start by planting seeds to build a strong relationship. Use active listening, be comfortable with silence and do activities that allow children to express their feelings in other ways (e.g., artistic expression, role-play, journaling and mediation exercises).

4th-8th Grade

Some tips include:

- Adults are often too quick to jump in with answers, to try to solve problems and to give advice to kids. But we get farther faster if we can be patient, listen, validate the child's feelings and let them do the talking. A good approach to building relationships is to let silence provide an opportunity or a platform for students to express themselves. So, instead of jumping in to try to solve problems, give students an opportunity to get to know you and come to trust you and your opinion.
- Another good way to build rapport is to discover and talk about common interests like music, sports, books or other subjects or activities you both might be interested in.
- It's important to be genuine and authentic. Sometimes we want to put on our adult hat (teacher, coach, parent, etc.) when really what kids want and need is somebody to be authentic with them. They are pretty good at spotting somebody who's not being genuine and that can really hinder your relationship.

- On a more subtle level, communicate availability. Either with language or just being physically present. This helps to send a message to the student that you are available.
- It is important to acknowledge when you might not be the right person for a kid. Sometimes we try to hang in there because we want to make it work and we know we can help, but it just isn't working. It's okay to say, "You know what? This isn't a good fit. Let me find somebody that I know who will be."

9-12 (Teens)

1. Set expectations for students regarding communication. Teach them to take responsibility to communicate circumstances affecting performance, mood and behavior.
2. Encourage a variety of means to communicate within what is allowed by the school – email, text, twitter, in person or voice mail.
3. Check with other teachers, coaches, aides, etc. to give all a heads up and enlist a team approach.
4. Involve parents, counselors and any other administrative staff right away.
5. Don't develop exclusivity with students as you may be in over your head and you will not always be available in their time of need.
6. Build an action plan with the team and discuss it with the student.
7. Keep parents informed (e.g., school card, emails, text, etc.).
8. Even if it seems that the situation has been resolved, continue to check back with the student at scheduled intervals and randomly as well.
9. Design lesson plans and develop learning experiences that draw students into the group.
10. Praise approximations. Empathize.

Linda McGuire, Boys Town National Hotline Supervisor

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, conversation starters, behavioral disorders, behavioral health, kids and behavioral disorders, active listening, communication skills

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens, Understanding Behavior, Disorder

Metadescription- In the sixth part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts share suggestions for how teachers can develop and build relationships with students who have behavioral health problems.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Question #6

Do you have any suggestions for developing and building relationships with kids who already have behavioral issues, or issues keeping them from communicating?

K-3rd Grade

Children with severe behavioral problems may also find it extremely difficult to share their feelings with others. It may be helpful to take a child who struggles with getting to know others on a sort of "ride along" or "listening tour" with you. By riding along, they will not feel the pressure of having to interact. Instead, you can model communication skills during friendship activities. By having them go along to listen and watch how you talk and get along with others, they can observe how you observe cues, wait to speak without interrupting and share appropriate topics.

4th-8th Grade

Fundamentally, all humans respond to, and typically don't get enough of in their day-to-day lives, others authentically acknowledging, showing appreciation for and approving of them as a person and who they are. When behavior is going south and your relationship with a student is strained, you can improve things by focusing on praising students for their behavior and performance. A good praise ratio to use is 5:1, meaning for every corrective interaction you have with a student work to find five things to praise the student for through appreciating, accepting and acknowledging the things they do well and what they bring to the table. When you do this in an authentic way, students come to see you as an ally.

9-12 (Teens)

1. Show interest in the whole person rather than just as a classroom student.
2. Develop rapport through social conversation – e.g., ask open-ended questions, show interest in small bits of personal student information and reward efforts immediately.
3. Seek out opportunities to connect with student outside the classroom – e.g., say "hello" in the lunch room, in the hallway between classes and before or after school.
4. Adjust expectations with the goal of improvement versus mastery.
5. Praise approximations.

6. Provide an ongoing overview of expectations and feedback on progress.
7. Maintain high ratios of positive-to-negative interactions.
8. Whenever possible, draw others into communication with the student.
9. Utilize various means to communicate – e.g., written notes, high fives, smiles and nods in addition to verbal exchanges.
10. Encourage students to stop by anytime for any reason to talk.

Linda McGuire, Boys Town National Hotline Supervisor

Connecting with Kids is a seven-part series on how teachers can better communicate with students of all ages. Each month we pose a specific question about communication to a variety of our Boys Town experts; from the Boys Town Center for Behavioral HealthSM to the Boys Town Common Sense Parenting[®] program and many who serve the Boys Town National Hotline[®].

Keywords- connecting with kids, connecting with students, communicating with students, effective communication, social skills, school and communication, conversation starters, anxiety, active listening, coping skills, stress

Tags- Connecting with Kids, Education, School, Teens, Tweens, Coping Skills, Coping Skills for Teens, Crisis, Stress, Anxiety

Metadescription- In the last part of the Communicating with Students Series, Boys Town experts share advice and coping skills teachers can offer students to address loss, stress, and other difficult emotions.

Title- Communicating with Students Series

Question #7

What tips can you offer to kids to address things like loss, stress, difficult emotions, etc.?

K-3rd Grade

Some of the best medicine for loss or stress can be found in good old fashion care and kindness. Children, like all of us, will experience ups and downs. What is most helpful during difficult times is to have a trusted adult who can teach children how to handle and cope with their emotions and make good choices. It is important to never underestimate the power of a little praise, and a few minutes of genuine concern and kindness can help a child weather almost any emotional storm.

4th-8th Grade

Here are some suggestions:

- Let kids know it's okay to have big feelings and strong emotions. Then, help kids identify what emotions they are feeling because they aren't very good at that. The more they understand their emotions and emotional

reactivity to things, the more they come to know themselves. And that's where confidence comes from.

- Educate kids on when it might be helpful for them to reach out to someone by learning signs in their own behavior and emotional reactions that might indicate it would be beneficial to talk. Then, make sure they know there are resources available.
- Modeling how to handle big emotions is another great way to teach kids how to cope with them. You might tell a struggling student, "Hey, sometimes I feel really sad or frustrated or anxious. And here's how I know that I feel that way, and here's what I do when I feel that way."
- If you think a student is struggling, make sure they're getting a lot of positive attention and praise from you. Seek out additional opportunities for one-on-one time or more subtle one-on-one time.

Be mindful of over-interpreting experiences. Sometimes we attach adult meaning to adolescent behavior and make things bigger than they may actually be. We have to be careful not to add more meaning to a student's experience than may be true.

9-12 (Teens)

Kids today seem less prepared to deal with tough issues that inevitably pop up in the course of life. And talking about them isn't the easiest or most natural thing for teens to do – especially in today's electronic world where texting, chatting, emailing or some other electronic means of communicating is much more popular and prevalent.

Talking face to face, voice to voice and heart to heart with a trusted adult (parent, grandparent, family friend, school staff, etc.) is still by far one of the best ways to address difficult issues and emotions. Kids might be more willing to talk to adults about these things if they know how to approach and start the conversation.

A good way to help kids learn how to do this is to choose a time when distractions are minimal. Talk to them about the words to use to ask adults for help – e.g., "When you were my age, did you ever have to deal with... (loss, stress, difficult emotions/situations, etc.)? How did you handle it?" Teaching kids how to ask the right questions can help them become more comfortable and willing to begin asking for help when they are struggling.

Pat Thomas, Boys Town National Hotline Crisis Counselor

