

Mags & Dad's

Connecting Through Chaos

*The 10 Minute Guide to better
Family Communication*



by Dan Thurmon & Maggie Thurmon

It's never too early, or too late to intentionally improve your relationships.

There's no such thing as a perfect family. Yet family relationships are with you for life, so they're worth improving. Parents and children, especially, have a complex and powerful bond that can lead to a lifetime of shared memories. Without attention or care, however, it can also lead to painful regrets and resentments.

While every relationship is a two way street, by making the first move you can create positive changes. Parents and children BOTH have incredible power and responsibility to influence one another – for better or worse.

“Doing life” as a family is about cultivating an environment where both parents and children can share ideas, make choices, and express themselves to each other with respect and honesty. This approach will sustain you through life's challenges and help you appreciate and enjoy more good times together.

Being “connected” is the first step.

This guide provides four pathways for stronger connections, each with a set of suggestions for conversation and action.



The First Pathway

Connecting for Growth

The first agreement in a healthy relationship is that neither of us is perfect, and we want to get better in some, or many ways. Throughout your lifetime, you'll be acquiring new skills, changing habits, and learning from mistakes. This pathway is about admitting when you're wrong, asking better questions, and committing to improvement. When parents can express their shortcomings and desire for growth, this doesn't weaken their authority. On the contrary, owning your improvement conveys strength and authenticity.

Rather than simply being the “authority,” you become a companion on life’s journey. You provide your child a genuine example of how to live with honesty and intention, and you make it far easier for them to see their own pathways to greater growth.

For conversation and action:

1. Share with each other the behaviors, skills, or ideas you’re trying to improve.

2. Share something that inspires you and makes you want to become better in some way.

3. What would it take to get there? How would you act or think IF you were really serious about growth?

4. Can we support each other in our desires to get a little better every day?



The Second Pathway
Connecting for Good

You don’t develop a stronger bond by focusing on what’s wrong with the other person. You must find the good.

As parents we tend to fixate on failures, faults and room for improvement. Instead, catch your kids doing the right thing. Compliment their strengths and positive intentions, and resist the urge to criticize. This doesn’t mean giving unjustified praise. It means being very careful with your words, understanding that your kids want to earn your approval. However, if they feel that they can’t do that because they never get approval, only judgement, they will dismiss your opinion altogether. BECAUSE you want your opinion to matter, you must make sure that you connect for good, first and foremost.

Then, your suggestions for improvement can be heard with a more open mind.

Kids, please believe that your parents love you and want what's best for you. It may not always seem that way. Parents only have limited examples and skills. They're often overwhelmed and trying their best. Often, they may not give the kind of love or help you desire, yet it may be all they are capable of at this moment. Presume the best, and extend some grace about their complicated lives. Also, tell your parents what you admire and love about them! Don't assume that because they're the parent they don't need (or want) to hear it. Everyone needs validation of what is "right" about them. You may find that once you are able to notice and verbalize the "good" in your parents, they will be able to give you more of what you need in return.

Life is unfair and confusing, full of mixed messages and endless examples of right and wrong. Parents and kids face daily choices of what they observe and process, and how to behave as a result. Small compromises of integrity generally get bigger, which is why it's important to connect about thinking, saying and doing the right thing – the "good" thing. As a family, this means having conversations about values – what is good, right, and beautiful – and a belief in something bigger than your own life and perspective.

For conversation and action:

1. What do you admire and appreciate about one another? Tell each other what you notice, and why you think it's good.

2. Talk about the values you stand for as a person and as a family? What do you want to be known for? When encountering difficult situations and choices about "what to do," what ideas will guide you?

3. What "good" would you like to see more of in the world? How can our family be a part of contributing to that?



The Third Pathway

Connecting around Goals

When the desire for growth takes a specific form, it becomes a goal. Goals aren't just ideas in your head or general feelings. They are specific intentions of what you aim to accomplish, achieve, or experience. Goals are written down, which brings them to life. Yet they don't have to be material. Goals can relate to your abilities, accomplishments, health and fitness, work or learning achievements. If it's on your mind, and in your heart, there's a good chance it can become a goal.

For conversation and action:

1. Commit to writing and sharing one or more goals with one another.

2. Why is this goal important, interesting, or exciting to you?

3. What will the goal require you to learn or do? How can we best support one another?

4. How will you know you've accomplished the goal? How will you feel and what will you do when that happens?



The Fourth Pathway

Connecting to Go For It!

Life is full of reasons not to take action, try, or stand up for what you believe. You're busy. You're scared. You're tired or overwhelmed. The timing isn't right. Other people will criticize you. If it doesn't work out, you'll look silly.

There is so much discouragement in the world, in general. And specifically, when people try to improve themselves, they're often pulled down by others who are threatened by a challenging, successful example.

This connection pathway is about committing to being, in your relationship, both the source and recipient of encouragement. It's about saying, "We are going to be here for one another, for a long, long time, offering support and help." We are learning to summon courage, management nervousness, and take action despite the fear and uncertainty. When you might not believe in yourself, you can borrow my belief in you. I will be the one who tells you you CAN do it, and helps you keep going when you are tired and may want to quit.

Great parents believe in and encourage their kids. That makes sense. Yet, what's also true is that great kids believe in and encourage their parents. Remember, this is a two way street. No matter your age, you have the ability to improve someone's belief in themselves for the better.

For conversation and action:

- 1.** Talk about where/when you get discouraged or want to give up, and may need some encouragement in your life.

- 2.** Back up your beliefs. Saying you believe in someone is powerful, and what's even more powerful is articulating why you believe in them. This goes back to noticing the good about one another, and reminding them they already have what it takes!

- 3.** What are the moments that make you nervous? What do you do about it? Talk about techniques for managing stress and nervousness, such a picturing a clear vision of success, taking deep breaths, and finding fun in the challenges.

- 4.** Decide on one specific way you will, starting today, be more encouraging of one another.

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Go Make Someone Smile

- Maggie Thurmon

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