

Let's Talk About It

In our last article, we invited you to engage an exercise that was designed to help you identify your educational values. Before we talk about our answers, let us again remind ourselves that no one is right and no one is wrong, and everyone is entitled to their opinion. If you want to ask a question, phrase it as inquiry (Such as “Why do you completely agree that children and adults deserve equal respect”) and not as criticism (Such as “Why in the world would you ever think that children and adults deserve equal respect? That’s just absurd!”) Asking questions is great, but only if the reason for asking is to understand the other person, not to argue or belittle.

In order to ensure that this conversation is productive and respectful, we invite you to use a process we use at The Open School called ‘circle.’ We’d like to emphasize that this is an invitation; if you just don’t feel comfortable doing it, then share however feels right to you. That being said, we find that using circle helps people listen when difficult conversations arise.

Circle

Pick a talking piece, something that can be passed back and forth. It could be something special or not; it doesn’t matter. Don’t stress about the talking piece.

Each partner should take turns answering the questions below, using the talking piece to remind each other whose turn it is to listen. Honor the rule that when one person is holding the piece, it is their job to be fully honest and to speak directly to the question (no long wandering monologues). Whoever is not holding the piece has the job of listening with an open heart, not thinking of how to respond, and not trying to argue or interrupt. This exercise is more about listening than it is about talking. Culturally, we are not trained to listen well; even with people we love it can be challenging. This is why it’s important to begin by reminding ourselves of how to listen from the heart.

When you are holding the talking piece, talk about your own experience, not what you think the other person is thinking, or trying to analyze what the other person has said. Don’t talk about abstract ideas, don’t talk about what the parenting magazine said, or your mother, or Oprah, or anyone else; just talk about how you feel and about your own experience.

*Using the talking piece, each partner should answer each of the following prompts.

1. As a way of beginning, say something you are grateful for in your family life.
2. Which 3 of the statements on the questionnaire are really powerful for you? Which statements do you think define your vision for your child's education?

*At this point, both partners may trade questionnaires. Read your partner's answers silently, without comment. Read it without judgment; read it like an ancient text, with an active curiosity about what it contains.

3. Comparing our answers, which answers did we agree on? Do those similar answers reflect some of our shared values?
4. Are there any answers where we really disagreed? If so, ask each other why they marked the answer they did.
5. What is sticking out for you that your partner has said? Without judging what was said, did anything surprise you? Did anything explain something to you about where your partner is coming from?