

A 13-DAY GUIDED CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS OF 6-10 YEAR OLDS

THE ACTUALLY TALKING CHALLENGE

From “fine” to real conversations with your 6–10 year old. 13 days. 10 minutes a day. Dinner, bedtime, or the car.

13 DAYS · 10 MINUTES A DAY · NO PREP

“How was your day?”

“Fine.” ...not anymore.

READ IT ON YOUR PHONE · PRINT IT FOR THE FRIDGE

YOU KNOW THE SOUND OF "FINE."

It's the answer that ends the conversation before it starts. You ask how their day was — "fine." What they did — "nothing." You try one more question and suddenly they're too tired to talk.

Here's the good news: the problem was never your kid. It's the questions. "How was your day?" has a built-in escape hatch, and every 7-year-old in America knows where it is.

This challenge swaps the questions that get dodged for prompts that get answered — and, just as important, it shows you what to do with the answer once you get one. For 13 days, you'll get one prompt and one small parent move per day. That's the whole assignment. Ten minutes, inside a routine you already have: dinner, bedtime, or the car.

No screens. No prep. No scripts to memorize. Nothing breaks if you miss a day — this is 13 days, not 13 consecutive days.

HOW TO USE THIS PACK

1. **Pick your moment.** Dinner table, bedside, or car seat — one slot you'll use most days. (All three work; the three ritual guides later in this pack show you how.)
2. **Each morning, read that day's card.** It takes about two minutes. The prompt is written word-for-word, so you can read it straight off your phone tonight.
3. **Ask, then use the Parent Move.** The move is the follow-up that keeps the conversation going past the first answer.
4. **Check the box.** One line of reflection per day. That's the whole journal.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Let's be honest about what 13 days can and can't do.

This challenge will not turn every child into a chatterbox. Some kids are quiet by nature, and quiet is not broken. The goal here is smaller and better: **a child who tells you something real, most days, because talking to you feels good — not dangerous, not like a quiz.**

Here's what that actually looks like as the days go by:

By Day 3, the goal is to get the first visible win: one real answer — a name, a story, a laugh — instead of "fine." It might be 45 seconds long. That counts. That's the whole point of the first three days.

By Day 7, the questions stop feeling like a trap. You'll hear details you didn't ask for — the "wait, what?" moment, when your kid mentions something you had no idea about.

By Day 13, the 10 minutes starts running on its own. You may notice your child starting to ask *you* the questions somewhere around Day 8. When that happens, you don't need a challenge anymore. You have a ritual.

Some kids take longer. If your child is guarded, literal, easily distracted, or neurodivergent, the adaptations section is for you — and slower progress is still progress. One real sentence on Day 9 is a win. Write it down.

What success is NOT: your child telling you everything, every day, forever. Nobody's kid does that. The win is that the door is open, they know it, and they walk through it more often than they used to.

THE 13-DAY TRACKER

Check the box, jot one line. Done. One line of reflection per day is the whole journal — and missed a day? Pick up where you left off. Nothing breaks.

DAY	THEME	DONE	ONE THING I HEARD TONIGHT
1	Break the pattern	☐	-----
2	Silly beats serious	☐	-----
3	The first real story	☐	-----
4	Opinions are safe	☐	-----
5	The best and the worst	☐	-----
6	Feelings have names	☐	-----
7	The "wait, what?" moment	☐	-----
8	Friends and the social map	☐	-----
9	Worries get air	☐	-----
10	What they need from you	☐	-----
11	They ask, you answer	☐	-----
12	The kid runs the conversation	☐	-----
13	Your family's ritual	☐	-----

Note to self: 13 days, not 13 consecutive days.

DAYS 1 TO 3

DAYS 1 TO 3

BREAK THE PATTERN.

BREAK THE PATTERN

Why today matters: Tonight isn't about depth. It's about proving to your kid (and to you) that a question can be fun to answer. One real answer is the whole win.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Okay, I have a very important question. Would you rather have spaghetti for hair, or sweat maple syrup? And you HAVE to pick one." Any silly either/or works if this one doesn't fit your kid — the rule is it must be impossible to answer with "fine."

PARENT MOVE

Go first, and be wrong on purpose. Answer your own question first, and pick the obviously ridiculous option with total confidence: "Maple syrup, easy. I'd be a pancake's best friend." Kids this age cannot resist correcting a parent who's wrong. The correction is the conversation.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know" SAY: "Good, because there's no right answer. I'm going maple syrup. You can judge me."

"One word ("spaghetti")" SAY: "Strong choice. Tell me one meal that would be a disaster with spaghetti hair."

"Silence / shrug" SAY: Don't repeat the question. Answer it yourself, out loud, like you're thinking it through. Then stop talking. Silence after a funny question is usually a kid deciding — give it ten seconds.

"This is dumb" SAY: "It IS dumb. That's the whole point. Your turn to ask me a dumb one." (Hand them the power — see Day 11.)

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Ask while plates are being filled, not once everyone's seated and staring at each other. Side-by-side beats face-to-face.

BEDTIME Lower the stakes: "One silly question before lights out."

CAR The car is the easiest room in the house — no eye contact required. Ask at a red light, then let the road do the work.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Okay. That was my one question. Thanks for playing." Then actually stop. Ending on time is what makes tomorrow's question safe to answer."

☐ I asked the question and didn't push past the close.

One thing I heard: _____

SILLY BEATS SERIOUS

Why today matters: Day 1 proved a question can be fun. Day 2 proves *you* can be fun — the parent who laughs at the answer instead of grading it. Tonight's skill is the one you'll use for the next 12 days: reacting to the answer, not the quality of the answer.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"If our family had a mascot — like an animal that had to live with us and represent the whole family — what should it be?"

PARENT MOVE

Ask "why" exactly once, then build on whatever they say. When they answer, your only job is: "Okay, why that one?" — then take their reason seriously and add to it. "A raccoon. Honestly, fair. We do eat snacks at weird hours." One follow-up, one build. That's the move.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know" **SAY:** Offer two ridiculous options to make choosing easy: "Fine, I'll narrow it down. A sloth or a goose. As a family, which one are we?"

"One word ("dog")" **SAY:** "Too easy, everyone picks dog. What would our dog mascot's job be?"

"Silence" **SAY:** Nominate one yourself and make it slightly insulting to yourself: "I'm saying a pigeon, because we're always a little late and a little scruffy." Kids will jump in to defend the family's honor.

"Shrugs and walks off" **SAY:** Let it go for tonight. Try the car version tomorrow morning — trapped audiences talk more.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Open it to the whole table — siblings voting on a family mascot can run the whole meal. Your job is just to keep it from becoming a fight about whose pick wins.

BEDTIME Make it a two-person mascot: "What animal would be the mascot of just you and me?"

CAR Use passing scenery: "That squirrel we just passed — mascot material, yes or no?"

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"For the record, I'm still team raccoon. Sleep on it."

☐ I asked "why" once and built on the answer instead of steering it.

One thing I heard: _____

THE FIRST REAL STORY

Why today matters: This is the night the challenge earns its name. Days 1–2 warmed up the muscle; tonight you point it at real life — but sideways, so it doesn't feel like the old questions. The goal by tonight: one actual story from their day, told voluntarily.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"What was the funniest thing that happened at school today? And if nothing was funny, what was the weirdest?" "Funniest or weirdest" works because it's specific enough to grab onto (unlike "how was your day?") and it has no wrong answer. Every kid has a weird."

PARENT MOVE

Listen for the detail, and ask about the detail — not the event. When they answer, don't say "wow, cool" and don't ask a big follow-up like "and then what happened?" Pick the smallest, most specific thing they mentioned and ask about *that*. "Wait — he brought a WHAT to lunch?" Details are where kids keep the good stuff.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nothing happened" **SAY:** "Nothing funny OR weird? Okay, then I want the most boring thing that happened. Sell it to me." (Boring is easy to answer, and boring answers leak real details.)

"I don't remember" **SAY:** Shrink the target: "Just recess then. Funny, weird, or boring — recess edition."

"One word ("nothing")" **SAY:** Tell yours first: a 20-second story from YOUR day, the more mundane the better. Then stop. Modeling works better than asking twice.

"Silence" **SAY:** "Take your time, I'm not in a hurry." Then genuinely wait — count to ten in your head. Most kids fill a warm silence. Fewer kids fill an impatient one.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| DINNER | Everyone at the table answers, adults included — and the adults go first. Your boring-funny work story sets the bar low enough to clear. |
| BEDTIME | Bedtime is when it all comes out for a lot of kids. Ask, then stay quiet in the dark a little longer than feels natural. |
| CAR | Perfect timing: the drive home from school is when the day is still fresh. Ask before the radio goes on. |

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"I love hearing the weird stuff. That's my favorite part of dinner."

☐ I asked about a detail, not the whole event.

The story I heard tonight (one line): _____

DAYS 4 TO 7

DAYS 4 TO 7

KEEP THEM TALKING.

OPINIONS ARE SAFE

Why today matters: Kids clam up when they think there's a right answer and you'll grade it. Tonight teaches the opposite lesson: in this family, an opinion gets taken seriously — even a wrong one. Especially a wrong one.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Settle an argument for me. What's the best dinner food ever invented — and why is everyone who disagrees with you wrong?"

PARENT MOVE

Disagree a little, respectfully. Whatever they pick, take the other side — lightly. "Pizza? Interesting. I had you down as a taco person, and frankly I'm disappointed." Playful disagreement shows them that pushing back is safe here. A kid who can argue with you about pizza is practicing arguing with you about things that matter.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know" SAY: "No wrong answers, but there ARE wrong opinions, and my sister thinks cereal counts as dinner. Defend or attack."

"One word ("pizza")" SAY: "Correct. Now defend it in one sentence against tacos."

"Silence" SAY: Give them a smaller, dumber either/or: "Okay, easier one. Ketchup on eggs: genius or crime?"

"Whatever" SAY: "Whatever is not a dinner food. Try again." (Said with a grin — tonight, a little teasing is the point.)

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Debate the actual food on the table: "Rate tonight's dinner out of 10. Be honest. I can take it." (Then actually take it.)

BEDTIME Softer version: "What's one food you could eat every day forever?"

CAR "Best fast food fries" is a debate that has ended friendships among adults. It works great at 70 mph.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"For the record, you're wrong about pizza. But I respect the confidence."

☐ I let their opinion stand without correcting it.

One thing I heard: _____

THE BEST AND THE WORST

Why today matters: "How was your day?" fails because it's too big. Tonight's prompt has the same job — hear about their day — but it comes with handles. Two specific things, best and worst, is answerable. And the "worst" half quietly gives them permission to bring you the bad stuff.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Give me two things from today: the best thing and the worst thing. They can be tiny. Tiny counts."

PARENT MOVE

Take the "worst" seriously without making it big. When they share the worst thing, your reaction teaches them whether to ever do it again. The move: nod, stay calm, say "That's annoying" or "Ugh, that would bug me too" — and DON'T fix it, investigate it, or call the school. Small reaction, big door.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nothing was bad" SAY: "Lucky. Then best thing and most boring thing."

"Only gives the best" SAY: Don't force the worst. "Good one. I'll take the worst when there's one worth reporting." (There will be — and now they know the channel is open.)

"I don't know" SAY: Go first: YOUR best and worst from today, 30 seconds total, worst delivered calmly. Then wait.

"Silence" SAY: "I'll go first while you think." Then actually go first.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Round-robin for the whole table, adults included. Keep the rule: nobody gets to argue with anyone's worst.

BEDTIME This is the classic bedtime prompt for a reason — defenses are down horizontal. If the worst is a real worry, see the safety section at the back before you problem-solve at 8:45pm.

CAR "Best and worst" was basically invented for the drive home. Ask before the day goes cold.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Thanks for telling me the worst one. I like knowing both."

☐ When I heard the "worst," I stayed calm and didn't fix it.

One thing I heard: _____

FEELINGS HAVE NAMES

Why today matters: Kids ages 6–10 feel plenty — they just don't always have the words, and "how did that make you feel?" makes them clam up. Tonight sneaks emotion vocabulary in through the side door: other people's feelings first.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Did anybody at school today have a really good day or a really bad day — like a teacher, or a kid? What happened?"

PARENT MOVE

Name the feeling out loud, casually. Whatever story you get, attach one feeling word to it like it's obvious: "He sounded frustrated." "She must have been so embarrassed." "That sub sounded overwhelmed." You're not asking THEM to name feelings — you're showing them what it sounds like when feelings get named. After a few days of this, they start doing it themselves.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nobody did anything" **SAY:** "What about the teacher? Rate the teacher's mood today, 1 to 10."

"One word ("dunno")" **SAY:** Tell a tiny story from your own day with the feeling named: "My meeting today was SO frustrating — the projector broke twice." Then stop.

"Silence" **SAY:** Offer a multiple choice: "Fine. Was today more boring, more annoying, or more okay?" (Three options beat one open question.)

"Shrugs" **SAY:** "Okay, different question — did anyone LAUGH today? What at?" Laughing stories carry feelings with them automatically.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER "Who had the best day at this table? Who had the roughest?" — feelings attached to the people right there.

BEDTIME "What was today like for YOU — more good, more bad, or more in-between?" Bedtime is when the real answer to this one tends to surface.

CAR Point out the window: "That guy in the red truck looks like he's having a DAY. What do you think happened to him?" Guessing strangers' feelings is practice with zero risk.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"I like hearing about the people in your day. They sound like characters."

☐ I named at least one feeling out loud without asking them to.
One thing I heard: _____

THE "WAIT, WHAT?" MOMENT

Why today matters: One week in. Tonight's prompt goes after the thing "how was your day?" was always supposed to get you: the part of their life you can't see. Stay casual — you're fishing, but tonight you're fishing where the fish are.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"What's something that happened this week that I don't know about yet?"

PARENT MOVE

When you hear something new, react to the content, not the surprise. This is the night you might get the "wait, what?" — the story you had no idea about. The move: do NOT say "Why didn't you tell me?!" (That teaches them that telling you leads to an interrogation.) Say "Huh. Tell me the part with the ___" — react to the story, keep your voice level, save your surprise for later.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nothing" SAY: "Nothing all week? Then tell me the smallest thing that happened. Smallest thing wins."

"You already know everything" SAY: "I know the report version. I want the director's cut."

"I don't know" SAY: "Okay — what almost happened this week? Close calls count."

"Silence" SAY: Model it: "I'll tell you something from MY week you don't know about." One short, slightly funny story. Then quiet.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

- DINNER** Frame it as news: "This is the part of dinner where somebody breaks a story. Anybody got a scoop?"
- BEDTIME** The dark helps here. Ask, then be still. Bedtime silence does half the work.
- CAR** The Friday-afternoon drive is prime time — a whole week of material, nowhere to escape to, no eye contact required.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Thanks for the scoop. Same time next week."

☐ When I heard something new, I reacted to the story, not my surprise.

One thing I heard: _____

DAYS 8 TO 10

DAYS 8 TO 10

THE DEEPER STUFF.

FRIENDS AND THE SOCIAL MAP

Why today matters: For a 6–10 year old, friendship drama IS the news — it's most of what "fine" is covering up. Tonight you get the social map: who's in, who's out, and where your kid sits in it. This is also the night many kids start turning the questions back on you. That's the milestone — welcome it.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Who did you actually hang out with today — and what's that person like? Give me the scouting report."

PARENT MOVE

Ask about the friend, not the friendship. "Is she your best friend?" gets a shrug. "What's she like?" gets a character sketch — and inside the character sketch is everything: what your kid values, who makes them laugh, who they're circling around. Follow the friend, and you'll find the friendship.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nobody" SAY: "Nobody at recess? Okay — who did you ALMOST hang out with?"

"One word (a name)" SAY: "Good name. What's their thing — what are they known for?"

"I don't know" SAY: "Tell me about the kid who made everyone laugh this week. Every class has one."

"Silence" SAY: "When I was your age there was a kid who ____." One 20-second story about a childhood friend of yours — the weirder the better. Then stop.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER "Scouting report" framing works for the whole table — everyone profiles one person from their day.

BEDTIME If friendship trouble surfaces here (being left out, a fight), tonight is for listening, not solving. "That sounds rough. Tell me more" beats a plan at 8:45pm. More in the safety section if it's bigger than rough.

CAR "Who sits near you at lunch?" is beautifully concrete — literal kids can answer it, and the answer opens the map.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Your class sounds like a TV show. I need next week's episode."

☐ I asked about the friend, not the friendship.

One thing I heard: _____

WORRIES GET AIR

Why today matters: Every kid has a worry sitting somewhere, and most of them never say it out loud because saying it makes it real — or because they're afraid it'll make YOU worried. Tonight's prompt makes worries ordinary: something everyone has, in a size everyone can admit to.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"What's something that's been bugging you lately — even a small thing? Small is good. Small is easier to say."

PARENT MOVE

Shrink it, don't solve it. When a worry comes out, resist the two instincts that close the door: interrogating ("Who? When? Why didn't you tell me?") and fixing ("Well, just tell the teacher"). Instead: "That WOULD bug me. How big is it — annoying-big or keeps-you-up-big?" Naming the size of a worry is the first step to it not running the show. If what you hear is bigger than everyday stuff, the safety section at the back tells you exactly what to do next.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nothing bugs me" **SAY:** "Nothing? Impressive. What bugs other kids in your class, then?" (Talking about other kids' worries is the safe version — and it leaks.)

"I don't know" **SAY:** "I'll go first. Something that's been bugging ME lately is ____." Pick a real, small, age-appropriate one. Going first is the whole move tonight.

"One word ("school")" **SAY:** "School's big. Which part of school — the work part, the people part, or the lunch part?"

"Silence" **SAY:** "You don't have to say it out loud. Is it a school thing, a home thing, or a friends thing? Nod when I hit it." Categories let a silent kid answer without words.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Keep this one lighter at the table — "what's been bugging everyone this week?" — and save follow-ups for one-on-one. Worries don't like an audience.

BEDTIME This is the natural home for Day 9. Lights low, no rush, no agenda. If a real worry surfaces, your only jobs tonight are: stay calm, say "I'm really glad you told me," and don't schedule the solution for tonight.

CAR The car's no-eye-contact magic is made for this prompt. Some kids will only say a worry to a windshield.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Thanks for telling me. You don't have to carry that one alone, you know."

☐ I shrank the worry instead of solving it or grilling it.

One thing I heard: _____

WHAT THEY NEED FROM YOU

Why today matters: Here's a question most kids have never been asked: what do you actually need from me? Kids 6–10 have surprisingly clear answers — they've just never had permission to say them. Tonight also completes the loop: for ten days you've been learning to hear them; tonight you ask straight out how to do it better.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"If you could change one thing about how we do things around here — like a family rule, or how mornings go, or anything — what would you change?"

PARENT MOVE

Hear it without defending. Whatever they say, your answer is some version of: "Huh. Tell me more about that." Not "well, the reason we do that is—" The moment you defend, the suggestion box closes forever. You don't have to agree or change anything — you just have to take it in like an adult who can handle feedback. (You can.)

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"Nothing" SAY: "Nothing at all? You'd keep bedtime exactly where it is? Interesting." (A specific, slightly provocative example gets real answers.)

"I don't know" SAY: Offer the menu: "Pick a category: mornings, bedtime, dinner, weekends, or screen time. Which one's most due for an upgrade?"

"A joke answer ("unlimited candy")" SAY: Take it seriously for one beat: "Noted. Unlimited candy. What would be your SECOND change?" The real answer is usually behind the joke.

"Silence" SAY: "Think about it and tell me tomorrow. I'm genuinely asking." Then genuinely ask again tomorrow — following up is what proves you meant it.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER "Family suggestion box" — everyone puts in one, adults included. Yes, you have to take one too. Fair's fair.

BEDTIME One-on-one is where the tender answers live ("I wish you weren't on your phone at dinner"). If you get one of those: don't defend, just hear it. That's the whole move.

CAR "If you were in charge of this family for one day, what's the first rule you'd make?" — same question, lower stakes, good for guarded kids.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"For the record, I'm actually thinking about that one. Thanks for telling me."

☐ I heard their suggestion without defending or explaining.

One thing I heard: _____

DAYS 11 TO 13

DAYS 11 TO 13

MAKE IT STICK.

THEY ASK, YOU ANSWER

Why today matters: Conversation is a two-way skill, and kids learn it by doing both sides. Tonight they get to be the interviewer — which teaches them that asking questions is something people do for each other, not something parents do TO kids. (Also: they'll ask you something great. Be ready.)

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Your turn. You get to ask me any question you want — about when I was a kid, about my day, anything. I'll answer honestly."

PARENT MOVE

Answer for real, at their level. When they ask, give a real answer — not a deflection, not a lecture, not "that's a story for when you're older" (unless it genuinely is). A 30-second honest answer about your own childhood, your own day, your own mistakes teaches more about conversation than ten prompts. Kids who hear adults answer honestly learn that honesty is what this ritual is FOR.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know what to ask" **SAY:** Hand them a starter: "Most people start with 'what were you like at my age?' or 'what's the worst trouble you ever got in?' Just saying."

"Nothing" **SAY:** "Nothing? You have a free pass to ask me ANYTHING and you're passing? Bold move. The offer expires at bedtime."

"A question you can't fully answer" **SAY:** "That's a real question. Here's the part I can tell you at your age: ____." Honest about the limit, generous with the rest.

"Silence" **SAY:** "Okay, I'll make it easier: truth or truth. Ask me anything about today, and I have to tell the truth."

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER "Interview the parents" night — kids take turns asking the adults. Adults answer first, honestly, briefly.

BEDTIME One question, one honest answer, lights out. Bedtime questions from kids are often the ones they were carrying all day — answer the question UNDER the question if you hear it.

CAR "You ask, I drive" — the driver can't escape, which kids find deeply satisfying.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Good question. You're better at this than you think."

☐ I answered their question honestly, at their level.

One thing I heard: _____

THE KID RUNS THE CONVERSATION

Why today matters: For eleven days you've been steering. Tonight you hand over the wheel. A ritual only lasts if the kid owns it as much as you do — and kids own what they lead. Your only job tonight is to be a good audience.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"Tonight's conversation is yours. You pick what we talk about — anything you want. I'm just here for it."

PARENT MOVE

Follow their topic with genuine curiosity, even if it's Minecraft. Whatever they pick — video games, YouTube, a 12-minute plot summary of a show you've never seen — go WITH it. Ask the follow-up a real fan would ask: "Wait, so what happens if you ___?" The topic doesn't matter tonight. The message does: what YOU care about is worth talking about here. (The kid who can talk to you about Minecraft for ten minutes is a kid who knows the door is open when something bigger comes up.)

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know what to talk about" SAY: "Sure you do. What were you just doing before dinner? Start there."

"Nothing" SAY: "Okay, then I'll pick... no wait, that's not tonight's rules. Your pick. Take your time — I've got nowhere to be."

"Picks something you know nothing about" SAY: Perfect. "I know literally nothing about this. Explain it to me like I'm new."

"Silence" SAY: "We can also just hang out. But the offer stands all night." Then stay nearby and available — some kids need the door held open a long time before they walk through.

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER "Tonight the kids own the table" — adults are guests. Guests ask polite questions and don't change the subject.

BEDTIME "Tell me about your thing" is a perfect lights-low prompt. Let it run a few minutes past bedtime if it's flowing. This once, it's worth it.

CAR Queue up their topic: "You've got the aux cord AND the conversation. Total control. Go."

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"That was a good one. You should pick more often."

☐ I followed their topic without steering it.

One thing I heard: _____

YOUR FAMILY'S RITUAL

Why today matters: Thirteen days of prompts end tonight. What doesn't end is the 10 minutes. Tonight you and your kid build the thing that carries this forward: a named, yours-only ritual that doesn't need a challenge to survive. Naming it can make it easier to keep.

TODAY'S PROMPT — SAY IT LIKE THIS

"We've been doing this talking thing for almost two weeks. What was your favorite one — and should we keep doing it? Like, make it an official thing?"

PARENT MOVE

Build the ritual together, then name it. Pick the pieces together: which night(s), which moment (dinner, bed, car), and what the "opening question" will be — let them choose from the favorites of the last two weeks, or invent a new one. Then give it a name. "Friday Scouting Report." "Best & Worst." "The Weird News." A ritual with a name is a tradition; a ritual without one is a nice two weeks you had once.

IF YOU GET "FINE," "I DON'T KNOW," ONE WORD, OR SILENCE

"I don't know which was favorite" SAY: "I'll tell you mine: the mascot debate still makes me laugh. What was one you didn't hate?"

"Can we just keep doing the questions?" SAY: Yes. That's the whole point. "Deal. Which nights?"

"Shrugs" SAY: Don't force the ceremony. "No pressure — I'm going to keep asking the good ones anyway. You can join the official fan club later."

"Do we HAVE to name it?" SAY: "Nope. It can be the thing with no name. Very mysterious. I like it."

MAKE IT FIT YOUR NIGHT

DINNER Make tonight's dinner the first official meeting of the new ritual. Same table, same 10 minutes, new name.

BEDTIME "Same time tomorrow?" is the only vow a bedtime ritual needs.

CAR "This car is now the official headquarters of ____." Kids will hold you to it. Let them.

CLOSE IT OUT — NO PRESSURE

"Thirteen days. Look at us. Same time tomorrow?"

☐ We picked our ritual and gave it a name (or agreed it needs no name).
Our ritual is called: _____

THE RESPONSE CHEAT SHEET

12 PHRASES THAT OPEN KIDS UP

- 1** “Tell me the part with the ____.”
(zooms into the detail, where the good stuff lives)
- 2** “Wait — what happened right before that?”
- 3** “Okay, why that one?”
(the one follow-up that works on almost any answer)
- 4** “That would bug me too.”
(takes their side before taking anyone else's)
- 5** “How big is it — annoying-big or keeps-you-up-big?”
- 6** “Huh. Tell me more about that.”
- 7** “What was the weirdest thing today?”
(weird has no wrong answer)
- 8** “I'll go first.”
(then actually go first — 30 seconds, then stop)
- 9** “You can judge me, but I think ____.”
(being wrong on purpose is an invitation)
- 10** “Take your time. I'm not in a hurry.”
(then count to ten in your head)
- 11** “Is that a school thing, a friends thing, or a home thing?”
(categories for kids who can't find words)
- 12** “I'm really glad you told me that.”

6 PHRASES THAT SHUT THEM DOWN

- 1** “How was your day?”
(built-in escape hatch; every 7-year-old knows where it is)
- 2** “Why didn't you tell me?!”
(teaches them that telling you leads to trouble)
- 3** “You're fine / that's not a big deal.”
(the fastest way to become the last to know)
- 4** “Well, just tell the teacher.”
(fixing before listening closes the door)
- 5** “Who? When? Where? Why didn't you say something?”
(the interrogation stack — one question at a time, or none)
- 6** “You should just ____.”
(advice they didn't ask for ends the conversation they started)

Nobody uses the right phrase every time. If you catch yourself mid-shutdown, just say: "Wait, that came out wrong. Tell me again." That sentence fixes almost anything.

THREE RITUAL GUIDES

Dinner table, bedside, or car seat — all three work. Use the one you already have; the ritual guides below show you how to make each one sing.

RITUAL GUIDE

THE DINNER TABLE GUIDE

Dinner is the classic slot for a reason: everyone's already there, and food gives quiet kids something to do with their hands while they think.

Make it work: Ask while plates are being filled, not once everyone's seated and staring — side-by-side beats face-to-face for this age. Adults answer first, always; your boring-funny work story sets the bar low enough for everyone to clear. Keep the rule: nobody argues with anyone's answer, and nobody's "worst thing" gets investigated at the table. If a sibling pile-on starts, your job is referee, not interviewer.

Watch out for: the table turning into a quiz show where the kid performs for an audience. If your child goes quiet when siblings are loud, run that day's prompt one-on-one later and let the table be the warm-up.

RITUAL GUIDE

THE BEDTIME GUIDE

Bedtime is when it all comes out. Defenses are down, the day is done, and the dark does half your job — kids say things to a ceiling they'd never say to a face.

Make it work: Lights low, sit or lie down, ask once, then be still. Count to ten in your head after the prompt — bedtime silence is almost always a kid deciding, not a kid refusing. If a real worry surfaces at 8:45pm, tonight is for listening: "I'm really glad you told me" and a hug beat any solution. Solutions can wait for morning; the feeling that telling you is safe cannot.

Watch out for: letting it run so long it becomes a stalling tactic. Ten minutes, then the close: "Same time tomorrow." A ritual that ends on time is a ritual that survives.

RITUAL GUIDE

THE CAR RIDE GUIDE

The car is the easiest room in the house. No eye contact, no escape, and a windshield to talk to — some kids will only say the big stuff at 40 miles per hour.

Make it work: Ask before the radio goes on, or use a song as the timer: "One question, then you get the aux cord." The drive home from school is prime time — the day is still fresh. Red lights are for follow-ups; traffic is for listening. Don't turn around — eyes on the road is a feature, not a bug. It makes you safer to talk to.

Watch out for: using every drive. If every car ride becomes question time, the car stops being safe. One prompt per drive, then let them have the window. ---

THE FALLBACK CARD

For the night everything flops. Read this, reset, keep going.

Every family has at least one flop night in 13 days. The kid refuses. The prompt lands wrong. Someone's tired, someone's grumpy, someone (possibly you) had a day. A flop is not a failed challenge — it's a Tuesday. Here's the reset:

- 1. Stop immediately.** The moment you feel yourself pushing, stop. Mid-sentence is fine. "You know what, we can skip tonight" is a complete sentence — and it's the sentence that keeps tomorrow possible.
- 2. Don't re-ask tonight.** One prompt per night, ever. Re-asking teaches them that "no" doesn't work, which is the opposite of everything this challenge is building.
- 3. Do something side-by-side instead.** Dishes, Lego, a walk to the end of the street, sitting on the same couch. No agenda, no question. Side-by-side, no-demand time is not a consolation prize — it's the maintenance that makes the questions work.
- 4. Say the close anyway.** "Same time tomorrow?" — warm, brief, no guilt attached. Then let it go.
- 5. Tomorrow, pick up where you left off.** Not a makeup day, not a lecture about yesterday, just the next card. The challenge is 13 days, not 13 consecutive days. Nothing broke.

If the flops outnumber the wins for three nights running: drop down a level. Go back to a Day 1–3 silly prompt, or run the car version instead of the dinner version. Guarded kids often need a full week of low-pressure before anything real comes out. Slow is not failing. Slow is the speed some kids go.

The one rule that outranks everything: never make talking to you feel like a chore with a deadline. The ritual serves the relationship, not the other way around.

ADAPTATIONS

No script survives contact with every kid. If your child is literal, guarded, easily distracted, ADHD, or otherwise neurodivergent, nothing is wrong with them — and nothing is wrong with you. These kids often become this challenge's biggest fans once the prompts fit how their minds actually work. A note before the adaptations: these are starting points, not diagnoses. You know your kid; take what fits, leave the rest.

THE LITERAL KID

Open-ended questions ("what was today like?") genuinely don't compute — there's no handle to grab. This isn't stubbornness; it's precision.

- **Swap hypotheticals for specifics.** "Would you rather be invisible or fly?" may get "that can't happen." Try: "Rank these three: recess, lunch, PE." Rankings, ratings, and either/or questions always have an answer.
- **Give the question structure.** "Tell me one thing" is hard. "Tell me one thing that happened at recess" is doable. Anchor every prompt to a time and a place.
- **Answer literally yourself first.** Model the exact shape of answer you're asking for: "My best thing today was the good parking spot. Tiny, but true."

THE GUARDED KID

Some kids hold everything close — not because nothing's happening, but because sharing feels like exposure. Pressure confirms the fear; patience disproves it.

- **Let them answer about other people.** "What bugs kids in your class?" is answerable when "what bugs you?" isn't. The answer leaks the real one.
- **Use the car and the dark.** No eye contact lowers the cost of every answer. Guarded kids talk to windshields and ceilings first, faces later.
- **Accept the nod.** "Is it a school thing, friends thing, or home thing? Nod when I hit it." A nod is an answer. Treat it like one.
- **Never share their disclosures at the table.** One "guess what YOUR son told me" in front of siblings and the vault seals for months.

THE EASILY DISTRACTED OR ADHD KID

The paradox: talks non-stop about nothing, shuts down about everything. The motor runs fast; the brakes are the issue. Work with the motor.

- **Keep prompts to one sentence.** Long setups lose them. Ask, then stop talking.
- **Talk while moving.** Walking, shooting hoops, riding in the car, building something — a body in motion frees up the mouth. Sitting across a table "to talk" is the hardest format there is.
- **Expect the exit ramp.** They'll start on your prompt and end up on YouTube drama. Follow the ramp for a minute — the way back usually appears on its own, and the ramp itself is often the real answer.
- **Shorter windows, more often.** Five minutes that happen beats ten that don't. Two mini-talks a day is a perfectly good version of this challenge.

A NOTE FOR EVERY NEURODIVERGENT KID

Autistic kids, ADHD kids, anxious kids, kids who are some mix nobody's named yet — the pattern above repeats: concrete beats abstract, side-by-side beats face-to-face, movement beats stillness, patience beats pressure. And one more thing: many of these kids communicate in ways that don't look like conversation — showing you the same rock four times, info-dumping about trains, sitting nearby saying nothing. That's talking. When it happens, treat it like the good stuff, because it is.

You know your kid. Take what fits, leave the rest — and slow is not failing.

WHAT TO DO AFTER DAY 13

The challenge ends. The 10 minutes doesn't. Here's how to keep it alive without turning it into homework.

Run your ritual. Whatever you named on Day 13 — keep it small and keep it regular. One or two nights a week, same slot, same loose shape. A ritual that happens most weeks beats one that's scheduled daily and dies by February.

Keep a running bench of prompts. Your kid's favorites from the 13 days are your bench. Rotate them. Retire any that start getting shrugs — prompts have a shelf life, and that's normal. When the bench runs thin, invent new ones using the same recipe: specific, no wrong answer, slightly fun.

Let the seasons feed you. The first week of school, the week after a fight with a friend, the last week before summer — life keeps delivering material. The ritual is just where it gets talked about.

Expect fade, and restart without drama. Some weeks the ritual won't happen. Some months it'll feel like Day 1 again. That's not failure — that's family life. When you notice the drift, don't announce a big comeback. Just ask a good question at dinner tonight. Day 1 is always available.

Watch for the turn. Somewhere in the months ahead — if it hasn't happened already — your kid will start a conversation with you, unprompted, about something that matters to them. That's the whole thing. That's what the 13 days were for. When it happens, do what you practiced: listen for the detail, stay calm, don't fix it, and be glad they told you.

IF YOUR CHILD SHARES SOMETHING SERIOUS

Most of what comes out in these 13 days will be ordinary kid life — funny, weird, occasionally annoying. But when kids learn that talking to you is safe, they sometimes bring you the big stuff too: bullying, fear, something that happened to their body, something an adult or another kid did. If that moment comes, how you respond in the first minute matters more than anything you do after.

IN THE MOMENT

1. **Stay calm on the outside.** Your face is the first thing they check. If your face says panic or anger, the door closes — even if the panic is love.
2. **Say this first:** "Thank you for telling me. This is not your fault, and you did the right thing." Those two sentences do more than any advice.
3. **Listen more than you talk.** Let them finish. Don't press for details, names, or a timeline tonight — repeated questioning can feel like disbelief, and you'll have time for facts.
4. **Don't promise secrecy.** Promise help instead: "I'm going to help with this, and we'll figure out the next step together."

AFTER

write down what they said, in their words, while it's fresh. Then act on what you heard. Bullying or safety issues at school → contact the teacher or school counselor. Anything involving harm to your child's body or safety → your pediatrician and, where required, your state's child protective services or local authorities. You don't have to be certain before you ask for help — that's what professionals are for.

WHEN TO SEEK QUALIFIED LOCAL HELP

if your child shows lasting changes — not sleeping, not eating, new fears, sudden anger, withdrawal that lasts weeks, or any talk of hurting themselves or others — that's beyond a conversation challenge, and it deserves a professional. Start with your pediatrician or school counselor and ask for a referral to a licensed child therapist. In the U.S., you can also call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) anytime, or text **HOME to 741741** (Crisis Text Line). If a child is in immediate danger, call 911.

Asking for help is not an admission that this challenge failed. It's what a parent who hears the truth does with it — and your kid told you because you built a place where the truth can go.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

This challenge was built from two things: what parents of 6–10 year olds say actually happens at their dinner tables (public parent discussions and reviews examined during the research), and a small shelf of books that have earned their reputations over decades. Nothing here is therapy or medical advice — it's a practical routine informed by the approaches below.

THE CLASSICS THIS CHALLENGE BORROWS FROM

Faber, A. & Mazlish, E., *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. In print since 1980 for a reason: the core idea that kids talk more when adults acknowledge feelings before fixing problems is the backbone of every Parent Move in this pack.

Gottman, J., *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. The research-grounded case that kids who can name emotions handle them better — the idea behind Day 6's "name it casually" move.

Siegel, D. & Bryson, T., *The Whole-Brain Child*. The insight that kids need experiences connected and narrated before they can make sense of them — why this challenge asks for stories, not reports.

Kennedy, B., *Good Inside*. The modern standard for the idea that behavior is a window, not a verdict — and that connection is the job underneath every conversation.

Harvard Center on the Developing Child — *Serve and Return*. The serve-and-return model of back-and-forth interaction between children and caregivers is the developmental backbone of this whole challenge.

HealthyChildren.org / American Academy of Pediatrics — *Communication Skills Start at Home*. The AAP's guidance on building communication skills in early and middle childhood underpins the age-6–10 framing throughout.

WHAT PARENTS THEMSELVES TAUGHT US

the prompts, fallback moves, and ritual design come from patterns in public parent discussions and reviews examined during the research — what worked at actual dinner tables, in actual cars, at actual bedtimes, and what flopped. The audience's own words shaped everything: parents don't want more theory, they want to know what to say at 7:42pm when their kid says "fine."

A NOTE ON EVIDENCE

this pack makes no clinical claims and wasn't tested in a lab. It's a structured routine built on widely respected parenting approaches and a large body of real-world parent experience. Results vary from family to family — and if your family's situation calls for more than a conversation routine, the previous page tells you exactly where to start.

THE ACTUALLY TALKING CHALLENGE

13 DAYS AGO, “FINE” WAS THE WHOLE CONVERSATION.

Now you have the prompts that get answered, the moves that keep them talking, and a ritual your kid helped build.

“Same time tomorrow?”

“Same time tomorrow.”

A PARENTING RESOURCE, NOT THERAPY OR MEDICAL ADVICE · RESULTS VARY FROM
FAMILY TO FAMILY