

# STRATEGIES for MINDFUL LIVING

Courtesy of UAB Employee Assistance & Counseling Center

## Becoming an “Askable” Parent

As a parent, you have given great thought to your children’s health, education and the kind of values you want to instill in them, but how much thought have you given to your approachability as a parent? How would you feel if your child made a terrible mistake because he felt as though he couldn’t come to you with a problem or question? Some problems might never make themselves known unless your child let us in on the secret. If your child doesn’t feel comfortable talking to you about certain topics because of fear or embarrassment, you’re left in the dark with no way to help.

Children who aren’t getting information from their parents will search elsewhere for answers, diminishing your parenting influence and leaving your child vulnerable to misinformation or advice that cuts against your family’s values.

By becoming an askable parent, you are presenting yourself as an open and safe channel of communication for your child. Children of askable parents feel safe approaching and discussing difficult and embarrassing issues like sex, drug and alcohol use, peer pressure or relationship issues.

Here is some advice for how to become an askable parent...

### ■ OVERCOME EMBARRASSMENT

Parents often become unapproachable to their children because of their own embarrassment or discomfort. We are all products of our own upbringing; issues that weren’t okay to talk about with our own parents frequently become taboo for us, as well. While overcoming a natural reluctance to discuss difficult issues may be a challenge, remember your children take their cues from you. If you react in embarrassment to a particular topic, your child probably will, as well. Rehearsing difficult subject matter before being put on the spot is a good way to calm potential embarrassment or stage fright.

Let’s be honest — some topics are embarrassing. It’s OK to acknowledge this to your child while reinforcing that they can come to you with any question or problem — especially if it’s something they personally find embarrassing.





### ■ **ARM YOURSELF WITH INFORMATION**

Building a broad knowledge base will help to build your child's confidence in their ability to confide in you. When your child asks you a question that you don't have the answer to, openly acknowledge that you can't provide an immediate answer and promise to revisit the issue when you have better information. Always follow up promptly to signal to your child that their concerns are important to you.

### ■ **BE HONEST AND DIRECT**

Parents often worry about giving their children information they are not old enough to process. A good rule of thumb if you're not sure what is appropriate to discuss

***A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that 75% of kids want more information about sexual topics.***

is to start by asking your child what they already know about the topic. Bottom line, if they are hearing about it from their peers, it needs to be addressed.

Always be as forthright as possible, not only with information, but with the values and morals that guide your advice and decision making. When giving advice, it is helpful to include your reasoning so that your child can place your advice into greater context.

The ultimate goal is for your child to be able to reason through difficult challenges using the values and lessons you have instilled in them

to come to healthy and responsible decisions without your direct guidance.

— Adapted from [WorkExcel.com](http://WorkExcel.com)