

Things

March 31, 2010



Things! The more the better! iPods, clothes, snack foods, American Girl dolls, you name it — someone out there wants your kids to want it and ask you for it, and they want you to get it for them. It's really important that our kids learn to distinguish between those things the advertisements tell them they must have and those things that they truly need — things with real meaning and good value.

If you had all the time in the world, you would be able to teach your kids how to avoid every possible trick used by television, radio, print, and packaging advertisers to get us to “want” what they have to sell. But it's more likely that training your kids will happen one conversation at a time. And the conversations will grow in depth and richness as your kids mature.

How to start those conversations? Here are some suggestions that parents tell us have worked for them.



When To Do It

Spare moments, quiet time on Sunday morning, in the car

What To Do

Let your kids help plan and manage the activity budget you choose this year — and take part in the activities, too, of course!

- Area to Explore:** "If our house caught on fire, and we had to run for our lives, and you could save just one thing, what would it be — and why?"

Why Ask: This question can help you and your kids determine which of the items you own are just “things” and which are truly precious — things that you really need for that sense of rightness in your world, things that would be really hard to replace.

Follow-up Activity: Work with your kids to do a simple inventory of their own personal things, then assign rankings of importance. When they are done with this, try listing things that belong to the family and ranking them, too.
- Area to Explore:** "If you could give any gift to anyone you wanted to, what would it be and who would you give this gift to? Why would you give the gift to that special person?"

Why Ask: This question taps into your kids' natural spirit of generosity, kindness, and compassion. It turns all things into potential gifts, and it encourages your kids to focus on how good it feels to give to others.
- Area to Explore:** "If you could invent something, what would it be? What would it do?"

Why Ask: This question asks kids to evaluate how necessity and creativity can lead to the creation of some really cool stuff/things. These inventions might be great, or a variation on something that's already available, or hysterically funny.

Follow-up Activity: Talk with your kids about whether what they want to make would be valuable to others or just to them. If the conversation leads that way, talk with your kids about whether we really need more things to be made. For example, what kinds of things might help others and what might just fill our garage?
- Area to Explore:** "If you were going to be alone on an island for one year and could take only one book to read, one song to hear, and one photograph to look at, which would you take — and why?"

Why Ask: Some things have continuing value and importance to us. We want to read them, hear them, and see them over and over again. Pausing to think about why these special things have such lasting meaning can reveal what your kids hold dear and what lifts their spirits.

Things to note:

- Be prepared to volunteer your answers to the questions and to answer your kids' follow-up questions.
- These questions can help you learn what your kids value most — beyond the things. It's a great way to find out how much your family values really are shared.

What You Will Need

Paper, pencils or pens
Time to Talk

Talk About It

This is a fully “talk to your kids” exercise.