

Read this first

Talking games are easy to ruin. Four things to watch.

1 Answer first

Go first on any question that could sting. Children copy the depth of the first answer, not the instruction.

2 No fixing

When a child describes a bad day, advice arrives as criticism. Ask one question instead, and only if they want it.

3 Never force a bright side

Asking “but what was good about it?” too early teaches children to hide the bad days from you. Ask once, accept no.

4 Stop early

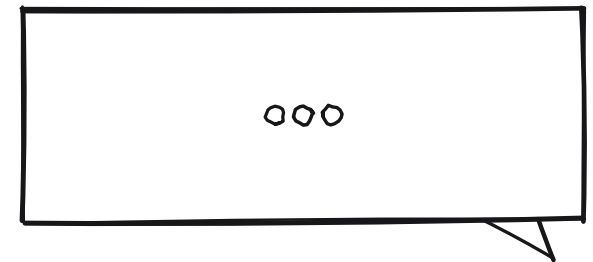
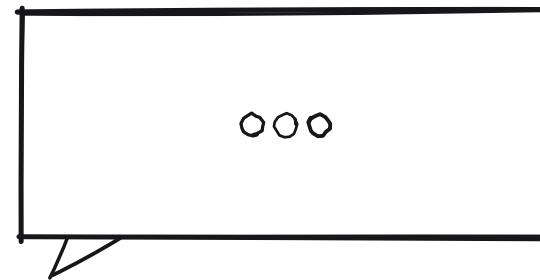
End while they still want another round. These games work because they never feel like homework.



After tonight's game, let your child stamp here

Just Talk

15 games with nothing in your hands, ages 8 to 13



In the car, in a queue, at the table, before bed.

Grown-ups: start on the back page.



Three rules

These three are what make talking games work.

1 Grown-ups answer too

If only the child answers, it is a test. If you both answer, it is a game. Go first when the question is hard.

2 Let them finish

No corrections, no “actually...”, no rushing to the point. You can ask anything once they stop talking.

3 One game, then stop

Play one, enjoy it, stop while everyone still wants more. Ten minutes is plenty.

Where these work best

In the car and at a charging stop, waiting for food, in a queue, walking the dog, and the half hour before bed.



Stay steady

The worst bit of today

10 min

Say	“Tell me the worst bit of your day. I will not say anything until you finish.”
How	Listen all the way through. No fixing, no advice, no silver linings yet. Then you tell yours.
Then ask	“Was there one small part that was still all right?”
Careful	If they say no, leave it. Do not push for a bright side; being heard is the point.

Who helped you today?

5 min

Say	“Who made your day a bit easier today?”
How	Name a person and what they actually did. Both of you answer.
Then ask	“Do they know that it helped?”
Level up	Tell that person tomorrow, or write them a two-line note.

Next time I would...

10 min

Say	“Tell me about something that flopped today. Then tell me the plan.”
How	Describe what went wrong in one sentence, then one thing you would do differently next time.
Then ask	“What would you need to make that plan work?”
Careful	You go first with one of your own flops. It makes theirs safe to tell.

Think it through

Twenty questions, the smart way

10 min

Say	"I am thinking of something in this room."
How	Only yes-or-no questions. A good one rules out about half of everything left.
Then ask	"Which question helped most? Which one was wasted?"
Level up	Do it in fifteen questions.

What if...?

10 min

Say	"What if wheels were square? Could a car still work?"
How	No right answers, but every answer needs a reason. Keep asking "and then what?"
Then ask	"Which of tonight's what-ifs would be the worst to live in?"
Level up	The child sets the what-if and you have to answer.

Say it well

One-minute advert

10 min

Say	"Sell me that lamppost. You have one minute, starting now."
How	Point at any object. The other person has to make it sound irresistible for sixty seconds without stopping.
Then ask	"Which sentence would make me actually buy it?"
Level up	Sell it to a different customer: a pirate, a teacher, a cat.

30 seconds, one thing

10 min

Say	"Explain the rules of your favourite game in 30 seconds. Go."
How	Anything goes: a game, a film, how a fridge works. Thirty seconds, no more.
Then ask	"What did you leave out, and did I still understand it?"
Level up	Do it again in 15 seconds.

Say it well

No “um”, no “and then”

5 min

Say	“Tell me about your day. If you say ‘um’ or ‘and then’, I take over.”
How	Talk for one minute. Every filler word hands the turn to the other person.
Then ask	“What do you say instead when you need a second to think?”
Level up	Ban one more word that you both overuse.

Story relay

10 min

Say	“Once upon a time there was a bus that refused to stop...”
How	One sentence each, in turn. Every sentence has to fit the one before it. No killing the story off.
Then ask	“Whose sentence changed the story the most?”
Level up	Every sentence must contain something you can see out of the window.

Listen well

Interview your parent

15 min

Say	“You are the reporter tonight. I am the guest.”
How	The child prepares three questions about your childhood and has to ask one follow-up after each answer.
Then ask	“Which answer surprised you most?”
Level up	Interview a grandparent by phone with the same three questions.

Swap sides

15 min

Say	“You want more screen time. I want less. Now swap: you argue my side.”
How	Pick a small disagreement you actually have. Each side argues for two minutes, then you swap and argue the other side.
Then ask	“What is the strongest point on the other side?”
Careful	Pick a light disagreement, not the one you are currently fighting about.