

LIFE SKILLS ACTIVITIES - INSTRUCTIONS

TALKIN' BALL – Ages 4/5 thru teen

The concept is simple. When first explaining the concept to your children, ideally have a tennis racquet and ball as your props. *(All you really need is a ball and if no ball is available just make one out of crumpled paper with a couple pennies inside and tape together.)* Ask them if it would be much fun playing tennis with a friend where you would hit all the balls over the net but your friend just stands there like a statue and doesn't even try to hit the balls back to you. All around his/her feet are lots of balls but none made it back to you over the net. That would not be fun and very quickly you would not want to play and may not want to play tennis with this friend again.

The art of conversation can be fun just like a good game of tennis where both players are doing their best to "keep the ball in play". Tell your child you are going to play a game of catch with one ball. Depending on the age and ability of your child/teen, stand facing each other just far enough apart that catching the ball is no problem. Explain all the instructions before you throw the ball for the first time.

Say something like this: *"I am going to THROW you this ball and ask you a question, but not a NO or YES question. A question that you would answer with a few words. When you CATCH the ball, you will answer the question but as you throw the ball back to me, YOU need to ask a question of me. When I catch the ball, I answer your question, then ask you another question as I throw it back to you. This is how we keep the BALL in play."*

EXAMPLE:

Mom/Dad – "What was your favorite thing you did yesterday?" (throw ball)

Child – "I loved it when we blew bubbles and tried to hit them with a fly swatter. (throw ball) Mom/Dad, what was your favorite thing yesterday?"

Mom/Dad – "I really liked working with you on your homework and we learned the difference between an alligator and crocodile. (throw ball) What was the most interesting fact you learned about an alligator?"

"Just keep the ball in play!"

Make it fun! Ask some silly questions as well, but keep the ball moving. You can make a small circle including more family members. They could even throw across the circle. This could be repeated often, not only to build their conversation skills but as a little exercise and family time together.

In their teen years, after years of practice with the TALKIN' BALL as a family, I would keep a ball in my car when I was "taxi-ing" my children to/from school, and all their activities. Now and then, when my questions would be dead-ended, or no one was talking to each other or to me, the driver, I would pull out the ball and without throwing it, would say: "TALKIN' BALL." With some chuckles or "oh, mom", the conversation would start; "Mom, what did you do today?"

Let me know how this life skill activity has worked in your home or how you adapted it.