

## Single Dads and Communication

For single dads it's easy for long-distance phone conversations to slip into "Uncle Dad" questions: "How are things going?" "Fine." "What have you been up to?" "Oh, you know. School and stuff." "How's your sister?" "Fine." "Well, it's been great talking to you."



Those conversations don't come close to expressing the love and concern you feel, but somehow you just can't get past the surface stuff. Well, here are five practical ideas from Ken Parker and Van Jones in their book, *Every Other Weekend*—and these can work for all dads:

First, think of some good questions in advance. Try keeping a list throughout the week of subjects to talk about with your child. You'll want to avoid a "checklist" approach, but it may help you stay focused on feelings and relationships, and avoid the "Uncle Dad" questions.

Second, avoid asking questions that can be answered in one word, like yes, no, fine, or okay. "Tell me about your school project." "How did you feel playing the violin in front of all those people?" "You want to be a marine biologist? What does a marine biologist do?"

Third, ask relationship questions. Go beyond "What have you been up to" and ask, "How have you been handling things?" or maybe, "Tell me what this divorce has been like for you." Set the tone by sharing your own feelings.

Next, model effective communication. Tell your kids what's going on in your life. Look for common ground and shared interests, whether it's sports, computers, a hobby, or even a TV show. Fill in those long gaps of silence with an amusing anecdote or recent observation. Not everything has to be deep or heavy.

Finally, tune in to the things your child cares about most. That may be completely different from what you care about. Your child may be more interested in kitty cats or computer games than grades and school activities.



**I think you'll be surprised how well these simple ideas will work—and how much a strained relationship can be helped by some healthy, open, father-child communication. In all things, love, love and listen, listen.**