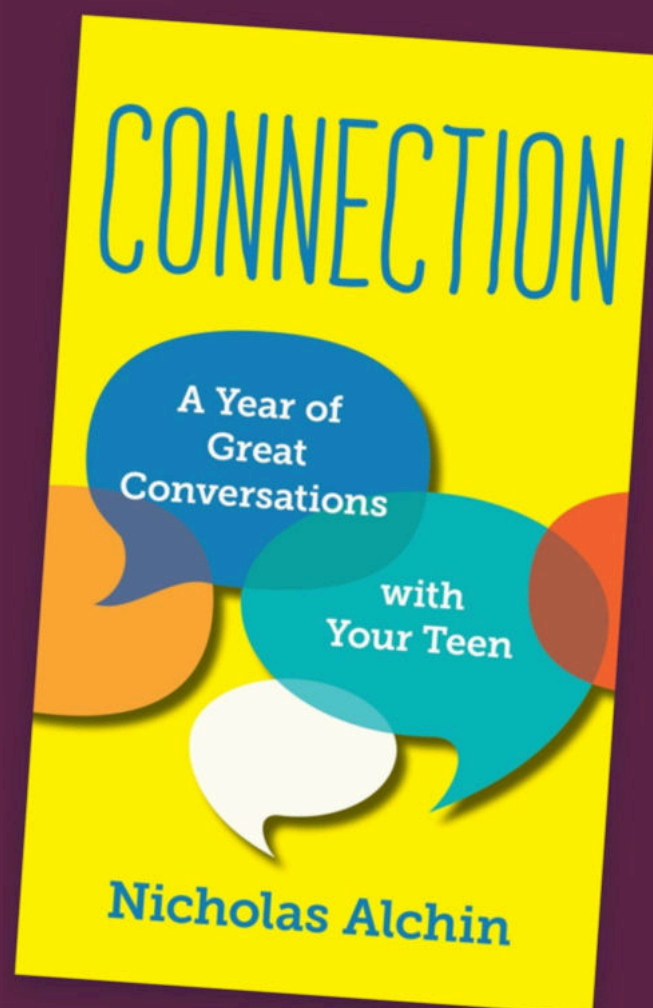


Talking with Teenagers

A guide for groups

For book groups, parents' associations,
and friends reading **Connection** side by
side.

nickalchin.com/books/connection



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Print and hand out: these pages are designed to be copied for each person.

Why do this together

I once heard one parent say to another, “I can’t believe the teachers all think my kid is so wonderful – if they only saw what it’s like at home!” The other parent laughed in recognition, and so did I.

That laugh tells us something. Teenagers show different sides of themselves in different places, and home, where they feel safest, is often where they are hardest work. In a way, it’s a compliment. But it means that we miss some of who our children are becoming. I have always been delighted by how much other adults like my own kids. It reminds me that arguments at home are just arguments at home, and that our children are bigger and richer people than the ones we meet at breakfast.

In a group like this, other parents can widen our view of our own children, and remind us that our struggles are shared. Putting our own experiences into words, and hearing how others respond, can also change how we understand them.

And then there is the sheer *relief* of hearing someone else say it first.

“This work transforms us as much as it transforms them, because connecting with our children gives us the chance to step away from the distractions of daily life and be our best and most joyful selves.” – Connection

Who it’s for

Book groups

Taking this as a next book, read over a term or a year.

Parents’ associations

Parents from one school or year group.

Friends and family

A few households, meeting at each other’s homes.

Schools

A school running the book as a parent programme.

How this guide works: three stages

This guide has three stages: an opening meeting, as many theme meetings as you like, and a closing meeting.



About the book

Connection has 52 short chapters. Each begins with a story, explores the idea underneath it, and ends with possibilities for conversation at home. The chapters loop through the seven themes. *How to Use This Book*, at the start of the book, says more.

Deep Connection

The Parenting Stance

Identity and Values

Mental Wellbeing

Social Ethics

Future and Purpose

Modern Balance

Practicalities

This page is aimed at the group facilitator.

How many people?

Six to ten. A larger group can split in two for discussions.

Who leads?

A facilitator keeps the group going: dates, venue, reminders, and the next theme if the group hasn't chosen one. The facilitator role can rotate each meeting.

What does the facilitator do?

Keeps time, moves the rounds along and makes room for quieter voices. Opens each meeting deliberately, guides the conversation with a light touch, and closes the meeting warmly. No expertise needed.

How long, how often?

Opening and closing meetings 90 minutes, theme meetings 60 minutes. Every four or five weeks would fit a school year.

Where?

A home, school or café. Online is not ideal, but can work with shorter discussions.

What does everyone need?

The book and a notebook. Something to eat and drink helps too; take turns to provide it.

Only doing a few meetings?

The shortest version is three: opening, one theme, closing. If you choose a few themes, these make good starting points.

The Parenting Stance

Deep Connection

Mental Wellbeing

Modern Balance

The opening meeting

Looking at our conversations now, and thinking back to our own experiences as teenagers, then practising the habits.

Purpose

This meeting needs to start with us, not our children. We notice where our own conversations stand today, and look back on what it felt like to be the teenager rather than the parent. And we hear from others doing the same. Then we'll do a little practice, to set ourselves up for what follows.

Before you come

REQUIRED

Talking with Teenagers **A note for parents**

Download from
nickalchin.com/books/connection
and complete before the meeting.

RECOMMENDED

From the book

- Introduction
- How to Use This Book
- Chapter 1, Dialogue



Keep your answers. We'll come back to what you wrote in the note in the final meeting.

Running order

Fill in **the note for parents** (page 6) before this meeting.

15 min

Welcome and ground rules

Each person says why they've come; about a minute each. Then read the ground rules on page 8 together.

Why: Hearing everyone's reason for coming, and agreeing the rules together, makes it easier to be honest later.

15 min

Where are you now, and what are you hoping for?

Review what you wrote in the note under "What do you notice now?" and "What are you hoping for?"; then share in pairs or as a group.

Why: Naming where things stand now makes it possible to notice, later, whether anything has shifted.

15 min

Thinking back

Review what you wrote in the note under "What did it feel like for you?" (what we carry, good and bad, from our own childhoods). This is probably better shared in pairs, since it can feel more personal.

Why: Our childhood experiences often shape how we parent, often without our noticing.

15 min

Which patterns do you recognise?

Review the four patterns described in the note, and what you wrote under "What tends to go wrong?"; as a whole group.

Why: Recognising a pattern together, rather than alone, makes it easier to see without feeling judged for it.

20 min

Practising the habits

Read the habits on page 9 together, then practise paraphrasing and asking questions in pairs, using the paired exercise in Appendix B of *Connection*.

Why: Trying them here means we're not learning them for the first time with our own child.

10 min

Commitments

Agree the date and theme of the next meeting. Then, to close, each person writes down one thing they want to try, and why, and what they hope to achieve, and shares it.

Why: Saying it aloud, to other people, makes it far more likely to actually happen.

Ground rules

Read these together at the start of the opening meeting.

1

Talk about the process of the conversation, not its contents.

Share what you said, how it felt, how it landed, and how your child responded — not what your child actually told you in confidence.

2

What's said in the group stays in the group.

Trust with each other is almost as important as trust with our children.

3

Listen to understand, not to fix.

Connection refers to the four habits of attending, paraphrasing, asking engaging questions, and patience. The group is a good place to practise them (see page 9).

4

Conversations that went badly are welcome.

They are often the most useful.

5

Think about whether your child knows.

Does your child know you're part of a group like this? Neither answer is wrong, but it's worth asking how they'd feel if they found out, and whether that's a conversation worth having with them too. It may be worth deciding as a group, since nobody wants a child to hear about it secondhand, from a friend whose parent did tell them.

The habits at a glance

Connection describes four habits that help conversations go deeper. Keep this page to hand whenever you practise them. There is more in *How to Use This Book* and Appendix B of *Connection*.

1

Attend, accept, validate

Show your child that their experience is real, that you care about it, and that their thoughts and feelings matter to you. Look for the kernel of truth in what they say, even when you disagree.

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE *"I know that was really important to you, so I can see why it feels like that."*

2

Paraphrase

Say back the meaning of what you have heard, in different words: sparingly, and especially when emotions run high. Even if you miss the mark, you will usually get a clarification.

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE *"My deadlines are next week, but my friends have great things going on this weekend." → "Sounds like you're worried about fitting in everything that you need to do."*

3

Ask engaging questions

Open questions prompt deeper thought; anything that feels like an interrogation shuts a conversation down.

- Keep it open: try not to start with "Did you...", "Will you...", "Have you..." or "Can you..."
- Ask "What...?", "How...?" or "Why...?", in plural, tentative language: "What might be some of the...?"
- Start with a short preamble: acknowledge what you have heard, and connect it to what else is going on.

IT MIGHT SOUND LIKE *"That sounds upsetting. I had the impression you always had a really good friendship with her. I'm wondering what might be some of the reasons this has happened?"*

4

Patience

Difficulty is normal once a conversation goes deeper. Resist the urge to solve anything immediately, and stick with it: you are playing the long game.

Theme meetings

One theme per meeting, for as many meetings as you like.

Purpose

To take one theme at a time and make it personal: how it shows up in our own families, what we have tried, and what we might try next. The conversation should be about us and our children.

How it works

Connection's 52 chapters range from the everyday (school, phones, friends) to the big questions (purpose, happiness, who they're becoming), but they all fall under seven parenting themes, described on pages 12–15. Each theme meeting takes one of them.

The chapters move through the seven themes in a loop, returning to each one roughly every seven chapters. So whichever theme you pick, its two anchor chapters fall within the first fifteen, and anyone reading in order will reach them quickly. Later chapters on the same theme are a bonus to bring along.

Choose the themes in any order. The group agrees the next one at the end of each meeting; if that doesn't happen, the facilitator picks one and lets everyone know. If you are only meeting a few times, page 5 suggests where to start.

Before you come



Read the two anchor chapters for the agreed theme, listed on pages 12–15, and try some of their possibilities for conversation at home. If you haven't managed to, come anyway: someone will recap the chapters at the start.

Running order

This is how every theme meeting runs, but it is a scaffold, not a script. If a conversation is going somewhere useful, let it run; the timings are there to help, not to hold you to them. What matters is that people feel heard, and leave understanding each other, and their children, a little better.

5 min

Welcome and recap

The facilitator welcomes everyone. A volunteer briefly recaps the anchor chapters for anyone who hasn't read them.

Why: So that everyone can take part, whether or not they managed the reading.

25 min

Conversations at home

In pairs for about ten minutes, talk about how your conversations at home have gone since last time, including what didn't work. Then come together as a whole group to share what came up. Some prompts:

- How did it feel for you, and why? How about your child?
- Where did paraphrasing or an engaging question help, and where did it feel clumsy?
- When and where does your teenager seem most open to talking?

Why: Pairs give everyone time to talk; coming together lets the whole group hear what's working, and what isn't.

20 min

The theme

Start in pairs, with one of the questions for your theme on pages 12–15. Whoever asks also practises paraphrasing the answer and asking a follow-up question (see the habits at a glance, page 9). Then come together as a whole group to share what came up.

Why: Pairs warm people up and rehearse the habits; coming back together gives everyone a chance to listen.

5 min

Quiet reflection

Each person writes alone in their notebook, in answer to: *What did I notice about myself as a parent today, and is there anything I might do differently?*

Why: A few quiet minutes to notice what you are taking away.

5 min

Next steps

Agree the next theme and date. Then, to close, each person names one thing to try before next time.

Why: Saying it aloud makes it more likely to happen, and agreeing the theme now gives everyone time to read.

The seven themes

What each theme covers, the chapters to read, and questions to discuss. How the themes work is on page 10. The anchor chapters are the two to read before each theme meeting.

Deep Connection

Ordinary conversations can become meaningful ones, and this theme looks at how. It explores listening so that a teenager feels heard, putting things right after a falling-out, and keeping a family close while a teenager grows towards independence.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 8 Influence · 15 Repair Later: 22, 29, 36 · Also: 1 (opening meeting)

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 Most of us can remember a conversation with our teenager that went better than we expected. What might have been some of the things that made it work?
- 2 Every family has its falling-outs, and most of us have found some way back from one. How have you gone about putting things right, and what might you try next time?

The Parenting Stance

This theme is about the stance we take as parents: more gardener than builder, more guide than instructor. It tests that stance against real decisions about school, motivation and freedom, and about how we spend our time together.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 2 Growth · 9 School Later: 16, 23, 30, 37, 43, 52

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 The book contrasts the gardener and the builder, and most of us are a bit of both. In what kinds of situations do you find yourself leaning one way more than the other, and why might that be?
- 2 If your teenager were asked what you mostly talk to them about, what might they say? And is that what you would hope they'd say?

The seven themes, continued

Identity and Values

Who is a teenager becoming, beneath the roles they are given? These chapters look at habits and self-awareness, at empathy and anger, and at the quieter wisdom that comes from reflecting rather than reacting.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 3 Authenticity · 10 Habits Later: 17, 24, 31, 38, 44, 49

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 Teenagers are still discovering who they are, and we are discovering it alongside them. What might be a recent moment when your teenager showed you a side of themselves you hadn't seen before?
- 2 Habits, tendencies, reflexes: much of what our children take from us is never taught, only picked up. Which of yours might you already see in your teenager, for better or worse?

Mental Wellbeing

Teenagers carry real emotional weight, and our job is to help them carry it rather than lift it from them. This theme covers stress, failure and confidence, and what makes a life meaningful rather than merely happy.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 4 Stress · 11 Systems Later: 18, 25, 32, 39, 45, 50

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 It's natural to want to take our children's stress away. When have you held back and let them work something through, and what did you notice?
- 2 Every family has its unspoken messages about difficulty: 'it'll be fine', 'this is a disaster', 'just toughen up'. What might your teenager be learning from yours about what to do when things are hard?

The seven themes, continued

Social Ethics

This theme is about how a teenager stands among other people. It looks at belonging without losing yourself, the trap of status, dignity and courage, judging people well, and keeping hope rather than sliding into cynicism.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 5 Respect · 12 Popularity Later: 19, 26, 33, 40, 46

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 Friendship and status matter enormously at this age, as most of us remember. When have you seen your teenager torn between fitting in and being themselves?
- 2 Respect runs both ways in a family. Where does it come easily between you and your teenager, and where does it take more effort?

Future and Purpose

None of us knows what lies ahead for our children, and these chapters don't pretend to. They explore purpose, creativity and passion, the grit to do unglamorous work, and the practical skills that we don't always think about.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 6 Purpose · 13 Creativity Later: 20, 27, 34, 41, 47

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 Most of us have hopes for our children's futures, and some of them may say as much about us as about them. What might be some of the hopes you hold, and where might they have come from?
- 2 When does your teenager seem most absorbed, and most like themselves? What might that suggest about the kind of life that would suit them?

The seven themes, continued

Modern Balance

How do we live well amid so much choice and distraction? This theme looks at desire and technology, the paradox of choice, the value of boredom, and telling what we need from what we have been told to want.

ANCHOR CHAPTERS 7 Desire · 14 Technology Later: 21, 28, 35, 42, 48, 51

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

- 1 Much of modern life is designed to hold our attention. What might pull hardest at your teenager's attention, and at yours?
- 2 Wanting things is part of being a teenager, and of being an adult. How do you tell, in your own life, what you want from what you need?

The closing meeting

Looking back at whether anything has shifted, and what might carry on.

Purpose

To look back honestly at whether anything has shifted, decide together what carries on, and mark the end of this stage — whether the group met three times or nine.

Before you come



Reread the note you filled in before the opening meeting, and write in your notebook: *What may have shifted for me? What do I want to keep doing?*



Bring something to eat or drink to share at the end. The last part of the meeting is a small celebration.

Running order

Please bring your notebook, with what you wrote before this meeting.

15 min

Welcome back

Each person says, in a minute or so, one thing that struck them when they reread what they wrote at the start.

Why: Everyone's voice is in the room early, and it links this meeting back to the first one.

25 min

Has anything shifted?

In pairs for about ten minutes, then as a whole group: has anything shifted in how you talk with your child, and perhaps in how you think about your own parents?

Why: This is the heart of the meeting. Pairs give everyone time to talk; coming together lets the whole group hear what may have shifted for others.

15 min

Surprises

Open discussion: what has surprised you, about your child or about yourself?

Why: Surprises are often where the real learning is, and they are easier to share once everyone has spoken.

15 min

What happens next

For your family: chapters still to read, a routine to keep. For the group: carry on, stop, or meet again in six months. The facilitator helps the group decide.

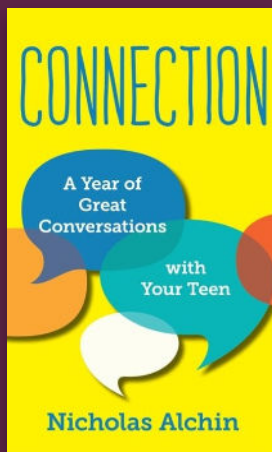
Why: Settling the practical decisions now leaves the end of the meeting free for the group itself.

20 min

Closing and celebration

Each person says one thing they have valued about this group, or one thing they will take away. Then mark the ending together: share something to eat, raise a glass, or simply thank each other. Is there someone you'd pass the book to, or a group you might start yourself?

Why: Groups that simply fade away miss the chance to acknowledge what happened; ending deliberately lets everyone take it with them.



Connection

The book has 52 short chapters, one for each week of the year, though you can read them in any order and at any pace. Each one begins with a story, explores the idea underneath it, and ends with possibilities for conversation at home.

Connection is published by Bloomsbury in March 2027.

“A beautifully crafted system to help parents engage kids in critical thinking about the small decisions that will become their behavioral compass. At once empathetic, wise, and deeply practical, this is a must-read for parents and educators of teens.”

Julie Lythcott-Haims

New York Times
bestselling author of *How to Raise an Adult*

“My biggest mistake was not spending enough time with my children. It could have been avoided if only Nick Alchin had written this beautiful book a few decades ago. Current and future parents need not repeat it.”

Kishore Mahbubani

Former Singapore
Ambassador to the UN

“Nick Alchin shows that parenting can be a source of deep reflection, and a period of human growth, not only for the child, but also for the parent.”

Olli-Pekka Heinonen

Director General,
International
Baccalaureate

Where to buy

Bloomsbury

Amazon US

Amazon SG

Books-a-Million

Waterstones

Connection, and *Talking with Teenagers: A note for parents*, are available at nickalchin.com/books/connection

I hope these conversations have been useful for your child, and indeed for you. Some may have been difficult, and others may have gone better than you expected. Either way, you have been attending to your child, and thinking about them, and that is all part of the process – awkward silences included.