

PRESIDENTS' **Letter****The Parent Child Dynamic:
You Can Count On Change**

In parenting, just as in music, the dynamics keep things interesting. But with the parent-child dynamic, changes may occur at dizzying—even alarming—speed. The key to building a rewarding parent-child dynamic is communication. Be prepared, and be in touch.

Even if whatever phase you're stuck in seems eternal, don't fret. Wait six months—a year at most—and it will have become something else. On the other hand, it won't do to get left behind. It takes effort to keep your footing on parenthood's shifting sands. You'll want to cultivate a nimble approach.

It starts early. Your pre-schooler goes off to kindergarten and along with that shift comes an opportunity for expanding conversation. Now your child brings you news of the outside world, from his perspective, instead of the other way around. Be ready for active listening and interactive dialog. Ask questions and offer encouragement. Think before you speak and tailor your reactions appropriately. Subtly communicate your values and encourage your child to begin forming her own. Even better, attend one of PIA's ParentTalk meetings and hear what other parents in your child's class are learning and doing.

Conversely, when your chatty 10–12 year old clam up and becomes a terse pre-adolescent, be ready. Learn the landscape. Talk to other parents. Know what's out there and what might be food for conversation. Attend a PIA Teen Scene panel, and hear kids just a few years older than yours describe what may sound like foreign territory. It isn't. It's your child's new world and he will be living in it for a while. Be prepared to dwell on the border for a few years, but keep the dialog alive. Embrace the shifting dynamics and fit conversation in where and when you can.



In fact, trying something a little offbeat can keep things interactive. Send your child a text so he won't be overheard talking to mom or dad on his cell. G-chat once in a while. Once when my daughter and I were in different rooms of our apartment I sent her a g-chat saying "I'm g-chatting you from the next room, just because I can." She was charmed. We had a nice long conversation. Maybe the computer was the intermediary, but the content was pretty meaty and our parent-child dynamic got a boost.

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Parents in Action has embraced its own shifting dynamics with a new style of leadership. This year we have two co-presidents, Ruth Cox and Melanie Wells, and we promise to work at keeping dialog thriving—not just between PIA and its constituents, but also between co-presidents, working together on your behalf, and hoping to prove the old adage that two heads are better than one. If we succeed, effective communication will surely be at the root of accomplishment. Underlying successful civilized life is successful communication—not just parent to child, but among adults too. So enter the parent-child dynamic with this in mind, and show your child how it's done. If it feels clumsy at first, persevere. You and your child will perfect it together. And you will give your child a skill he can use for a lifetime.

—RUTH COX AND MELANIE WELLS