

Love a good card game?

Great! It could be the key to staying close to your kids.



Talk to Me, Baby

We've come up with some creative ideas that will encourage your tyke to communicate with you in the years to come.

BY STEPHANIE ECKELKAMP

Talking to kids is a little like eating at a buffet: It's all about quantity versus quality. But encouraging your child to express his feelings is critical. With the help of Neil McNerney, a licensed child and family counselor in Reston, VA, we'll help make it fun.

PLAY MORE

Take the time you'd spend surfing the Net to play a game. McNerney suggests a new spin on a classic kid favorite, like Jenga or Candy Land. For Candy Land, assign a category to the different color cards

in the deck. For example, the red card is the "happy" card. When a player picks a red card, he has to talk about something that makes him happy. The same can be done with Jenga's colored blocks.

CHAT AND CHEW

The dinner table is a great place to prompt dialogue. Just look to the First Fam's awesome table tradition: Dinner at the White House involves an activity called "Roses and Thorns," in which each family member describes something good that happened that day

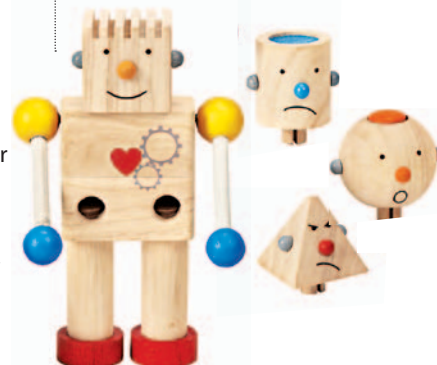
(the rose) and something not so good (the thorn).

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Whether you're talking at the table or playing a game, keep the topics simple—have your kid tell you what makes him happy, sad, angry; his favorite colors, animals, and foods. "This allows kids to take their feelings into account and understand who they are as people," says McNerney. "It also helps them see that their thoughts and feelings are important to you, which will make it easier for them to talk to you as they get older."

GET 'EM TALKING

Help him express himself with the new Build-A-Robot by Plan Toys. It was created by child development specialists to encourage kids, especially those affected by autism spectrum disorders, to identify and articulate their feelings. Now this makes us happy! \$35, myfootprintstore.com



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