

family conversation

having the deeper conversations cultivate love, compassion and authenticity

by Sarah Tolmie

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A couple of years ago my mum bought our kids a very simple card game called The Art of Conversation (TAOC). It consists of a double deck of playing cards that have just two questions or conversation starters and we go round in a circle and ask them to each other.

The aim of the game is to cultivate the skills of conversation, asking questions, listening to the answers and seeing if you

can think up another question based on the answer given.

Some questions are fun and light and quick to answer and some questions are amazingly deep and poignant and kick-start longer, deeper and more thoughtful discussion. And often the answers can be revealing, beautiful and surprising.

As an example, a random pick back through the last cards we played, this is one my young son had to answer: #45 Which musical instrument do you, or would you like to play? Answer: Drums (oh no you hear me groan). #46 How can you

help make another person's life happier? Answer: Be their friend, be kind to them and have fun with them. Tell them you love them. This answer from my 6 year old brought tears to my eyes.

And for my 9 year old the next card held these little beauties: #23 When is it hard to be patient? Answer: When I'm hungry. And #24 What is the biggest problem in the world? Answer: Global Warming. And that led to an in-depth conversation about the planet and the state of the world!

We play this game at least twice a week, usually during dinner. We can frequently

sustain the activity with our boys for about an hour. When friends or family join us for a meal, our boys will regularly suggest a game of TAOC and the results and richness of the conversation never ceases to amaze and delight. This small card game has transformed not only dinner time but our relationship with the kids. We get insights into them and their dreams and thoughts and it has also increased their appreciation and understanding of my husband and I too. We are revealed as more than just parents but adults with a history of experience and our own dreams and hopes. We now have a greater candidness amongst us, and have felt an expansion of love and compassion as we come to know and understand each other as whole, real people.

It made me think about the conversations we have with our friends and families. How deep do our core friendships actually go? How well do we know our peers and how well do they know us? So often the public face that we present to the outside world is a very thin veneer of the real us? How often do we even reflect on who the real 'us' is

and then how often do we then share that with others? Do we make the effort to really connect – to enquire about and share our thoughts, dreams, concerns and needs?

It takes courage to live authentically – to have a strong congruence between thoughts, feelings and actions. To strip back the carefully built facades we all create and reveal ourselves – our weaknesses, our dreams and hopes, our fears - means that we can leave ourselves open for rejection or ridicule. Sometimes it takes a crisis to bring the walls tumbling down and force us to interact on a deeper level. Sometimes this can be a way to foster a stronger and deeper bond with people. But sometimes, if the gulf between what is real and what has been superficial is too vast, the foundations of a relationship or friendship have nothing left to sustain it. More often than not however, being true to yourself, and in your interactions with others, opens a path for understanding. It unites people in our common humanity which ultimately is the foundation for compassion and love.

In my work as a celebrant I am regularly

immersed in conversations that go to the heart of deep and profound issues – love, children, family, and death. These conversations are revealing and tender and authentic. They are about the big things that we hold dear in our hearts. These conversations continually remind me that every person has a story and there is no such thing as an ordinary life – we all have our dramas, traumas, wonders and journeys that we travel.

Imagine if we all start to play the art of conversation with our loved ones and dear friends – really take the conversation to a deeper level of sharing and learning. Imagine how much we could learn about ourselves and each other. Imagine how liberating it could be to feel safe and comfortable to express the real authentic self to each other. The benefits of playing the art of conversation in our everyday life is not only learning about other, but learning about yourself. It can promote a healthy practice of self reflection. Know yourself. Accept yourself. Be yourself. And share this with others.