



By Gregory Ramey, PhD, child psychologist at Dayton Children's and *Dayton Daily News* columnist

## Talking with your kids

Here's an official transcript of conversations that occur daily at thousands of dinner tables.

*Parent: How was school today?*

*Child: Fine.*

*Parent: What did you do?*

*Child: Not much.*

Parents of kids from toddlers to teens are equally frustrated that well meaning efforts at communication are met by silence or superficiality. Children are growing up in an electronic world, and connecting with them means understanding and using that world to promote and provoke discussion. Two videos provide examples of how parents can use media to stimulate conversation with their kids.

At one extreme is the recent Burger King commercial that combines sexual images with Sponge Bob Square Pants to sell burgers and fries. Using the music from Sir Mix-a-Lot's *Baby Got Back*, this commercial is among the most offensive I've seen in a long time. The Burger King character dances alongside girls with "square butts." He then measures a girl's butt, and demonstrates a right angle on another butt. The closing line of the video is that "booty is booty."

Parents should be outraged that Burger King is using sexually-suggestive images to sell food to our children. Parents are organizing to send a strong message to Burger King that we won't tolerate sexualizing children for their corporate profit. We won't support videos about "booty" to sell burgers.

At the other end of the spectrum is the uplifting story of Susan Boyle, the Scottish woman who appeared on the television show, "Britain's Got Talent." This 47-year-old woman walked on stage looking very different from the other young, sleek, and fashionably-dressed contestants. "I've always wanted to perform in front of a large audience. I'm going to make that audience rock" she declared.

The audience and judges appeared ready to laugh her off the stage, but then something amazing happened. She started singing “I Dreamed a Dream” from *Les Miserables* and within moments the stunned audience was on its feet in wild applause.

“I know that everybody was against you,” one of the judges said. “We were all being very cynical.” Ms. Boyle has now become an international celebrity and is well on her way to realizing her life-long ambition.

If you want to provoke real conversations with your preteen or teenager, show them these videos. The Burger King commercial is all about using sexual images to sell stuff. Your kids will initially say that the video is funny, but ask them if they think their 4-year-old brother should view it. Talk about values, sex, and advertising. Ask them what influences them to buy certain products.

Boyle’s video is about hope, dreams, sacrifice and persistence. Before she sang a note, people made a judgment about her by looking at her face and clothes. Parents and kids encounter these types of prejudice every day. This is the kind of stuff your kids really want to talk about.

Talking with your kids is not always easy. Stop asking them about school, and start connecting to their world about real stuff.

To view the videos discussed in this article, go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search for “Burger King, spongebob” and “Susan Boyle.”

- View the [Burger King commercial](#)
- View [Britain’s Got Talent video of Susan Boyle](#)

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