

Conversation Starters

Another Way

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Let's Start Having Conversations With Our Kids!

One of the reasons that many parents or guardians avoid having conversations about sex, drugs, alcohol and other at-risk social behaviors is because they are reluctant or fearful about sharing their own personal histories. They don't want their children doing what they did, and many parents or guardians feel that their children will see them as hypocrites or think less of them. This is very common. You are not alone. With this in mind, it is critical that you are the one to have the conversations with your children – not someone else. Thus, when your children come to you about your personal history or experience or they question you during a discussion, consider responding to them in the following manner.

- If you have questions to ask me regarding my personal history with sex, drugs, alcohol or other social behaviors, please come to me. Don't ask someone else. Or, if someone else tells you something about my past, please come to me and I will explain.
- I will be honest with you and tell you what I can at the time – what I think you are old enough to understand. As you get older, I will share more with you. Again, please come to me. We will talk through it.

Another reason parents or guardians procrastinate talking to their children about sex, drugs, alcohol and other at-risk social behaviors is because it is not an easy conversation to have and many time parents don't feel equipped to do so! In order to create meaningful and purposeful dialogue, it is important that both children and parents do their homework. As you prepare to talk with your children, implement the following points:

- In order to get the full benefit of *Another Way*, it is really important for your children to complete the Book Club Questions / Individual Study Questions in the Appendix of *Another Way* or complete the Guiding Questions provided in this document.

- Keep it safe. Don't force your children into answering or sharing. They must feel comfortable and move at their pace.
- Let the book do most of the talking. Use the characters and their roles as a basis for addressing the issues.
- Be still and listen! Really listen.

Let's get started. There are two approaches to starting the conversation. Implement the one that works best for you and your children. Or, you might combine the two!



Parents Need To Start The Conversation!

Conversation Starter #1 – Book Club Questions or Individual Study

1. After you and your children have read *Another Way* or as you and your children are reading it, use the **Book Club Questions** or **Individual Study Questions** in the Appendix of *Another Way* to guide your conversations. It is highly recommended that that your children have completed the questions before your conversation. They are more likely to talk about their feelings if they don't feel "put on the spot".
2. After the questions have been completed or your children have had an opportunity to look them over and think about them, start your conversation with the questions from Chapter One. However, before you begin, normalize the conversation and make it as comfortable as you can. Begin your talk with a couple of general questions such as:
 - How do you feel talking about subjects like sex and drugs?
 - As you think about the questions, what are you wondering about?
 - Or, start with the last question for each of the chapters, "What is your favorite quote or what part means the most to you in this chapter? Why?"

3. Pace yourselves and go through the chapters slowly. Give your children time to think about your conversations and to prepare for the next one. In addition to answering the questions for each chapter, encourage them to write down their own questions to bring to your talks.
4. Allow your children to choose which questions they want to discuss. Remember, we want to keep the conversation as comfortable as possible. However, if you feel that some questions may not be age appropriate, hold off on those until later and explain why. Or, depending on how your conversations unfold, it may be a question that can be addressed later in the book through the experiences of the characters.
5. As you and your children work your way through the chapters, encourage them to work on the activities – the *Circles* and the *Code of Conduct*. And, if your family embraces a spiritual or religious practice where the principles of *Another Way* can be blended into your belief system, continue to support your children by integrating and implementing them into your faith.



Parents Can Lead And Teach By Listening And Guiding!

Conversation Starter #2 - Guiding Questions

After you and your children have read *Another Way* or as you and your children are reading it, plan time to have conversations about the book. Schedule these times in advance, allowing for one to two chapters in a session. One of the best ways to start a conversation with children of any age is to ask them open-ended questions. This gives them room to think. And it gives them permission to share their feelings. It is a *safe way* to approach a conversation. At the same time, if adults want to keep the conversation going, it is important to withhold judgment. Parents and guardians can lead and teach by listening and guiding. The following questions are meant to guide your talks, allowing for freedom and flexibility in your conversations.

As you begin your first talk, consider using the following questions as openers.

- How do you feel talking about subjects like sex and drugs?
- As you think about the questions, what are you wondering about?
- Or, start with the last question for each of the chapters, “What is your favorite quote or what part means the most to you in this chapter? Why?”

Then, begin with Chapter One.

Chapter One ~ *She Knew One Thing* ~

1. Chloe, one of the main characters in *Another Way*, loves to go the beach where she can be alone and think about things. What are your thoughts on having time alone – private time – to think things over? Or, do you prefer another way of sorting through your thoughts?
2. Chloe has some pretty set ideas about drugs and alcohol, but she is still trying to sort through her feelings about sex. When you think about these topics, what are you wondering about?

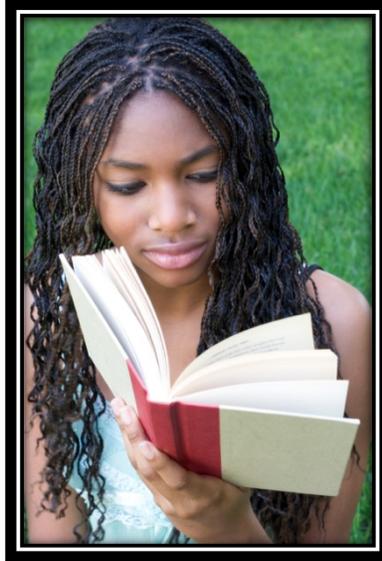
Chapter Two ~ *A Secret Agreement* ~

1. Both Chloe and Amanda don't talk to their parents about sex. Why is it difficult for kids to talk to their parents or guardians about sex? Where do you think most kids get their information? How do you think *Another Way* can help in talking about it?
2. Chloe and Amanda talk about a lot of kids at school they know who are sexually active. What are your thoughts about their conversation? Do you find the same thing to be true at your school, or with your friends, or kids you know? Why or why not?

Chapter Three ~ *It Feels So Good, It Must Be Right* ~

1. Rick, the youth pastor, begins the first lesson in *Another Way* by introducing the concept of *readiness*. What does *readiness* mean to you? What does it mean to be *ready* for sex? What is the difference between *knowing you are ready for sex* from *thinking that sex feels right*?

2. As Rick introduces the second lesson in *Another Way*, he also spends time talking to the students about their worth and value. In a homework assignment, he asks them to think about who or what is important to them. Who or what is important to you and why? How do those people or things add value to you? Are there any that don't? Why?



Give Kids Time To Read And Reflect!

Chapter Four ~ *He Really Loves Me* ~

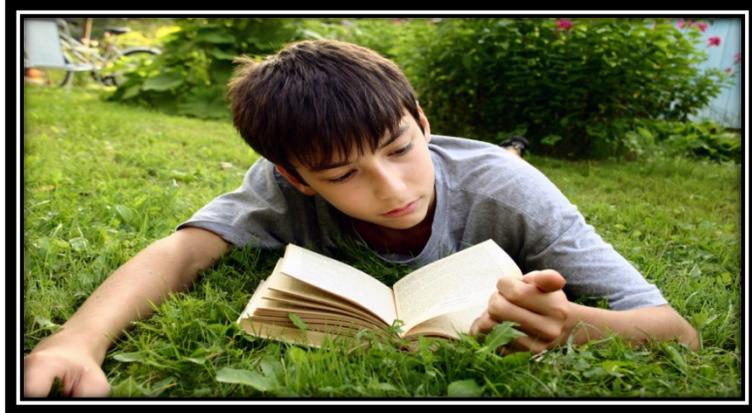
1. During Amanda and Chloe's talk about sex, Chloe questions Amanda about feeling pressured by Blair. What happens when there is pressure in a relationship to do something – sex, drugs, alcohol – and one person does not want to? How have you handled being pressured or how will you handle it?
2. Aside from wanting to be with Blair because he loves her and she loves him, Amanda says that being with Blair makes her feel that she is wanted and more valuable. She implies that being in a relationship with him fills a void for her. What do you think she means? I am wondering if you have any similar feelings about yourself? If so, what can I do to help you feel more valuable?

Chapter Five ~ I Don't Belong Here ~

1. Amanda feels a lot of regret for her choices in her relationship with Blair. What else do you think she might be feeling? If you were her friend, how you advise her? Was there a time where you felt regret over something? How did you handle it or did you ask for help? Would you be willing to share your thoughts?
2. Rick introduces a lesson on self-respect from *Another Way*. He talks about the importance of treating yourself with respect by protecting what is important or valuable to you. Do you think most kids treat themselves with respect? Why or why not? In what ways do you treat yourself respectfully? And if you don't, would you explain why you don't? I would like to help.

Chapter Six ~ I Lied To Myself...I Let Myself Down ~

1. In Chapter Six, as Amanda discusses her relationship with Blair, she says, "She did things she wasn't ready for but tried to make it ok in her mind...she lied to herself...she let herself down." Do you think a lot of kids feel this way? Why or why not? Have there been times when you might have felt this way? Why are these kinds of situations hard to talk about?
2. Amanda also tells Chloe that she continued to be sexually active in her relationship with Blair because she did not want to lose him as a boyfriend. Do you think this is common for both girls and boys? Why or why not? Do you think there are other reasons why kids stay in relationships even when they are not healthy for them? What are they? What do you think about staying in a relationship for the wrong reasons?



Give Kids Time And Space In Between Conversations!

Chapter Seven ~ *Finding Another Way Back* ~

1. Chapter Seven is a very difficult and emotionally heavy chapter. As many of the girls in group share their experiences with sex, drugs, and alcohol, they talk about *betraying themselves* and *feeling shame*. What do those words mean to you? As you read about the girls' experiences, what did you think? What did you feel? What did you learn from them?
2. *Forgiveness* is an important concept in this chapter. Monica explains *forgiveness as letting go of someone or something*. Tanesha explains that *forgiveness can also be an opportunity for-giving back to yourself* – to learn from our choices and to make different choices as we move forward. What are your thoughts on these two explanations? How can they be useful in your life? Are there other ways that you think about *forgiveness*? Would you share them?

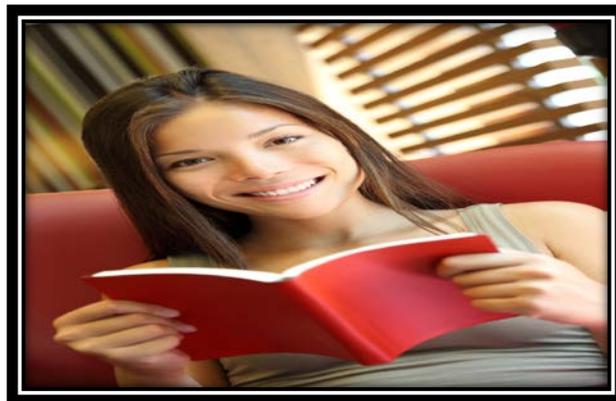
Chapter Eight ~ *Each One of You Matters* ~

1. Rick introduces the last lesson on living *Another Way*. He talks about how hurting others – through bullying, cyber bullying, using someone sexually, posting any kind of harmful photos or messages, etc. – not only damages another person but it also reflects poorly on the person doing these kinds of behaviors? What are your thoughts on this? Do you agree or disagree? What do you see happening to kids who are mean to others or who use others for their own gain or pleasure? What happens to the victims of the pranks, jokes, or other hurtful acts?

2. Rick concludes his last lesson by stressing how important it is that each student knows that he or she *matters*. Do you believe you matter? Why or why not? How does that help you to make decisions about how you treat yourself? How does that influence the way you treat others?

Chapter Nine ~ *Circles and A Code* ~

1. Chapter Nine shows us how helpful *The Circles and A Code* are for Chloe and Tyrell. They are tools for them to self-monitor and regulate what is important to them. The *Circles and A Code* act like an internal compass that guides both characters in their choices. What would work for you in helping to guide your decisions? Would you like to share what you have written down or what you are thinking? How can I support you?
2. After just a few months of dating, Tyrell and Chloe talk about their relationship. They discover that they want the same things. What happens to kids when they are in a relationship with different expectations about what they both want? How would you handle a relationship where the other person wanted or expected something different than you? When should *you* have a talk with someone about what you expected or wanted in a relationship with that person?



Parents, Be Good Listeners – *Really* Good Listeners!

Chapter Ten ~ *Her Way* ~

1. In Chapter Ten, both Tyrell and Chloe talks about peer pressure and peer judgment. If you choose not to do what everyone else is doing – sex, drugs, alcohol – do you think you will be made fun of? How will you handle that? How can I support you?
2. Both Tyrell and Chloe have learned that they have the power to define themselves and determine their worth by staying true to the principles they set for themselves. What can you start doing today to determine your worth and define who you want to be? What have you been doing? How can I support you and help you in preparing for what is ahead in your life and in choosing what is best for you?

Closing Questions

At the conclusion of each of your talks, ask your children these questions.

1. What is the most important thing you have discovered about yourself or that you are learning about yourself?
2. How can I support you or help you?



Be Available And Keep The Conversation Going!