

## Views from VanDeWalle

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### “Oh, what fun it is to”

A familiar holiday song pronounces “Oh, what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh laughing all the way.” It continues to say, “Making spirits bright.” The holidays are often times to relax and time to spend with family and friends. The times with family and friends may be around the dinner table eating or playing a game, decorating the house, playing in the snow, making favorite holiday treats, or watching a movie or the big game. One of my favorite things about the holidays is the opportunity to slow down and engage in playing games with family while eating cookies or some other tasty holiday treat. It is in playing games or just having time to catch-up that I able to reconnect with family members and gain insight on what has gone on in their life over past year.

Meaningful conversations for me are when I feel heard and listened to and when I return the favor of listening and understanding the person in which I am engaging in conversation. These conversations can take place while washing dishes, cleaning up the wrapping paper after all the presents are open, doing a puzzle, or at bedtime. As we approach the holidays, think about ways you can engage with family members or friends about what is taking place in their lives. Here are some tips for engaging in meaningful conversations.

- *Ask open ended questions.* By asking open-ended questions it gives a person an opening for a longer conversation and dialogue. Open-ended questions sound like, “How are you feeling?” or “Tell me more about...”
- *Be prepared to listen attentively.* Put away your phone and turn off all screens and make eye contact with the person to show that you are truly engaged in what they are saying. Ask follow-up questions that show you are interested, and you want to know more.
- *Listen without judgement.* Getting a lecture or being told that you are wrong can quickly end a conversation. Instead ask the person about their feelings regarding the situation. Share that you are willing to support them.
- *Capitalize on everyday events to engage in meaningful conversations.* Food preparation, clean-up and mealtimes are a wonderful time to ask family members about their day or what they like about the family, or what is their favorite holiday food. Bedtimes can also be a time to engage in conversations. Start a tradition of asking one question a night to discuss. Here are some questions to get you started in engaging in some meaningful conversation.
  - Tell me about a time when you felt happy.
  - Tell me about your favorite teacher.
  - Who is someone you really respect and why do you respect this person?
  - What is the best way for people to show that you they love you?
  - What is your favorite time of year?



To ensure the health and safety of family members and friends because of the global pandemic, this year's holiday celebrations and gatherings will be a bit different, but it doesn't mean that one has to forgo those meaningful and sometime silly conversations. These chats can be done in a person or virtually. It is important to remember that a gift of time is one of the best gifts one can give. Simply, young people and adults need human connections. We all need to be heard, loved, and supported. Take the time this year to listen, share, and to be vulnerable with each other over a card game, meal, or while engaging in a favorite holiday tradition. If you do, it really will "Make spirits bright".

*(Source: Michelle Krehbiel, Nebraska Extension Youth Development Specialist)*