

# How and Why Setting Matters During Difficult Parent-Child Conversations

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## Abstract

Research shows that open communication is essential for maintaining supportive parent-child relationships (Park & Kim, 2009). Particularly, children who have emotionally difficult conversations with their parents can develop effective coping strategies, as well as enhance their understanding of emotions (Gentzler, Contreras-Grau, Kerns, & Weimer, 2005). A factor to consider in facilitating parent-child conversations is the location in which these discussions occur. Literature regarding the importance of preferred location in parent-youth conversations is limited. Therefore, the objective of this study was to utilize qualitative research methods to examine the preferred setting in which parents and middle childhood youth prefer to have difficult conversations. The sample included 100 middle childhood youth in the fifth grade (47 daughters and 53 sons) and 100 mothers. Results showed that middle childhood youth preferred the bedroom, dinner table, and living room, while mothers preferred the dinner table, bedroom, and car, respectively.

## Youth Preferences

Location Preference	Percentage		Why Preferred?		Examples
	Daughters	Sons	Daughters	Sons	
<b>Bedroom</b>	45%	32%	1. Privacy (43%)	1. Relaxing (39%)	"I like it cause at night when I am in my bedroom all snuggly wuggly in my bed with my pajamas and my mom can just sit on my bed and talk to me"
<b>Dinner Table</b>	27%	19%	2. Relaxing (36%)	2. Privacy (32%)	"At the dinner table because that's the time when she's open to talk, and I'm open to talk, and also it's a private place because it's in the house"
<b>Living Room</b>	22%	14%	3. With Mom (22.7%)	3. Convenience (30%)	"Um normally we are in our living room because I think it's the safe place for us."

## Objective

- The objective of this study was to examine the setting in which mothers and middle childhood youth prefer to have difficult conversations. We examined three research questions:
  - 1) the location of the preferred setting,
  - 2) why that setting is preferred, and
  - 3) are there differences in setting between boys, girls, and mothers

## Design of Study

- Mothers and 5<sup>th</sup> grade youth answered open-ended interview questions as part of a larger study
- Thematic analysis was utilized to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

## Mothers' Preferences

Location Preference	Percentage	Why Preferred?	Examples
<b>Dinner Table</b>	51%	1. Multitasking (51%)	"We have conversations at the dinner table. We always have dinner together, so that's one thing I didn't have growing up so I really valued that. We have dinner together, and we also talk very honestly."
<b>Bedroom</b>	47%	2. Routine (38%)	"[...] [M]y preference is we usually talk at night before bed and so we're in his room sitting down where we can look at each other and actually make eye contact and we're not rushed or distracted by other things so that's my preference [...]."
<b>Car</b>	41%	3. Relaxing (35%)	"I think that's [the car] where I prefer to have it because he gets so uncomfortable to have those conversations when it seems more formal. Like if we are sitting at the table having this, he's so consumed by the formality of it, that sometimes he won't just be as open in terms of expressing himself"

## Participants

Participant Demographics	Mothers	Youth	
		Daughters	Sons
Caucasian	63%	57%	57%
Married	76%	X	X
Undergraduate Degree or higher	75%	X	X
Household income \$75,000 or more	61%	X	X
Age	M = 41.25 (Range 25-69)	M = 11.04 (Range 10-12)	

## Discussion

Our findings showed that youth preferred the bedroom, dinner table, and living room as locations to engage in a difficult conversation with their parent. These locations were chosen, as they were both private and comfortable, where youth could speak freely and not be heard by others. Regardless of gender, middle childhood youth shared preferred locations to have difficult conversations, while mothers differed. Mothers preferred locations that allowed them to multitask, followed by locations that were built into their everyday routine (e.g., driving in the car or while eating dinner). By getting insight into middle childhood youths' preferred locations, parents may use this information to create a comfortable environment for both the parent and child to ensure a more productive conversation when discussing difficult topics in the future.