

RESILIENT

THE 15 STRATEGIES

FAMILY

EVERY FAMILY OF WEALTH NEEDS

CAPITAL

KRISTIN MACDERMOTT, LMFT
AND JOCELYN BAKER

CREATORS OF THE MACDERMOTT METHOD™
AND RESILIENCE-BASED PARENTING™

FROM KRISTIN & JOCELYN

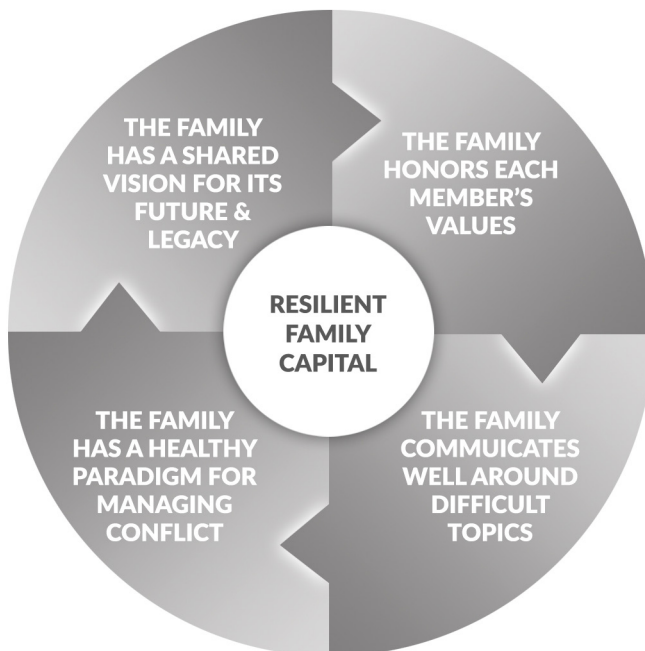
Why Family Capital is Important

When we think of the word wealth, what most often comes to mind is financial capital; we think about money. Yet, values-based financial advisors are quick to point out that accumulating money is not ever a wealth-holder's true goal. Money is simply a means to a goal, a goal that is unique to every wealth-holder.

When pressed, though, most wealth-holders have this goal: They want their children to be happy and self-sufficient. They want to have strong relationships with their children based on mutual respect. They want their children to share their values, and they want to enjoy time together, free of resentment.

Their goal is not to build financial capital, but rather to use their financial capital to build strong family capital.

A family builds rich family capital when the family honors each member's values, when the family communicates well around difficult topics, when the family has a healthy paradigm for resolving the inevitable conflicts that will arise, and when the family has a shared vision for its future and its legacy.



And yet, too often, financial capital gets in the way of family capital. Children from affluent families have significantly higher levels of anxiety and depression than other high school children. In fact, according to Madeline LeVine in *The Price of Privilege*, “by the end of high school, as many as one-third of girls from financially comfortable families can exhibit clinically significant symptoms of anxiety.” Boys have higher levels of anxiety and depression as well, and also a higher incidence of risky and dangerous behavior such as alcohol and drug use.

Consider the obstacles unique to families with means:

- Children whose parents have financial resources are expected to carry on a family legacy, but they often feel ill-prepared and insufficient to live up to their parents’ expectations. Because these children have access to the best schools, as well as any and all means of support for their academic and extracurricular endeavors, the expectations for them to succeed at the highest level creates enormous pressure.
- Having access to so much support can also prevent children from developing self-efficacy. Tutoring, private coaching and help with college applications can make kids feel like they cannot succeed on their own. And, in fact, when they never have to do things on their own, they do not build the skills of self-sufficiency and self-efficacy.
- It is often the case that parents with wealth have clear preferences and expected paths for their children in terms of education and career. This can limit the opportunities children have for making their own decisions, which also inhibits the development of self-efficacy. It can also foster resentment, when children feel they are not able to pursue their own interests. Furthermore, when they are working towards their parents’ goals rather than their own, they often fail to connect the dots between their present actions and their future outcomes. They are not fully ‘bought-in’ to their own futures. This puts them in an impossible predicament: earn the esteem of their parents, or earn their own self-worth.

This is a book about parenting your children in such a way that you can overcome these obstacles and build rich family capital. It’s authors — Kristin MacDermott, LMFT, and Jocelyn Baker — are the founders of The MacDermott Method and creators of *Resilience-Based Parenting™* and *Parenting Through Divorce™*, which are toolkits specifically designed to raise resilient kids.

1

Empower Your Conversations

“

**The conversations you
have with your children
are the backbone of your
relationships with them.**

”

PART ONE: EMPOWER YOUR CONVERSATIONS

Conversations are our most powerful tool for connecting with our kids. In fact, the strength of our relationships with our children can be measured by the strength of our conversations. You can tell how healthy and supportive a relationship is by how good the conversations feel.

If you have authentic, open conversations fueled by curiosity, you will have good-feeling relationships that bring out the best in everyone. If, on the other hand, your conversations are one-sided, agenda-driven and controlling, you will have fragile relationships that breed resentment, resistance, and disconnection.

The conversations you have with your children are the backbone of your relationships with them. We like to say, “The conversation is the relationship.” Consider your own relationships: The strongest ones are with people with whom the conversation is easy, honest, and respectful. You would be hard-pressed to pinpoint a strong relationship that isn’t accompanied by great conversations.

Likewise, you would be hard-pressed to pinpoint a bad relationship that isn’t accompanied by strained, disingenuous or unfulfilling conversations. Strong conversations and strong relationships go hand-in-hand. Good conversations build great relationships.

And when you have good conversations with your children, you build rich family capital.

Beyond that, conversations are our most powerful tool for teaching resilience and modeling the behavior we want our children to have. Your children are watching and learning from what you say to them, to your partner, to your friends, and even to your own self.

Fortunately, the mechanics of great conversations can be learned.

With that in mind, here are five strategies you can use to improve your conversations with your children. In doing so, you will also teach your children self-efficacy, build resilience in your children and yourself, and create an environment where both financial capital and family capital can thrive.

FIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE YOUR CONVERSATIONS:

- **STRATEGY 1:** Level with Your Children
- **STRATEGY 2:** Listen with Curiosity
- **STRATEGY 3:** Seek Their Opinions
- **STRATEGY 4:** Accept All Emotions
- **STRATEGY 5:** Become Fluent in the Language of Needs

STRATEGY 1: LEVEL WITH YOUR CHILDREN

One of the responsibilities of parenthood is to give children the information they need so that they can make good decisions for themselves.

As parents, we have the opportunity to be our children's best sources of information. We don't want to squander this opportunity, as our children need accurate information so they can make wise, well-informed decisions.

If we give our children *inaccurate* information, if we sugar coat or dance around issues, or if we lie to them, one of two things will happen:

1. They will either believe us and fail to live life with the necessary facts of reality, or
2. They will learn that we are not a trustworthy source of information.

If we give them accurate information, on the other hand, they will come to us with questions and trust that we are reliable sources of information. If we level with them, they will know they can count on us to give them the truth, even when it is hard and uncomfortable for us to do so.

Leveling with children means we give them accurate, age-appropriate information. It does not mean we have to give them information we would rather keep private, but it does mean we are honest when asked a question we would rather not answer.

Leveling with children has two components:

1. First, be your child's best source of information.
2. Second, tell your children the truth about how you *feel*.

Become Your Child's Best Source of Information

Be the person who *always* tells your children the truth, no matter how uncomfortable the subject matter.

This does not mean you have to share personal information about yourself. What telling the truth means is when your children ask you a question, you give them a truthful answer. Yes, it needs to be age-appropriate, but telling your 10-year-old that babies come from storks is not truthful.

If your children cannot get accurate information from you, they will search for it in other places. On the other hand, when you level with your children, you communicate to them that they can trust you to give them useful information that is consistent with reality.

If they are getting true and accurate information from you—about sex, drugs, relationships, whatever—then your children will come to you with their important questions, which will strengthen your bond with them.

When you level with your children by giving them truthful information, you also communicate that you respect them, and you believe in their ability to handle the world as it is. It communicates that you take them seriously.

It's also important to get ahead of conversations and try to be the one who first talks to your children about all things—or at least all of the big things. When your child's first conversation is with you, you can set the tone and you can more powerfully mold your child's paradigms about whatever it is you are discussing.

Again, leveling with children means you give them accurate, age-appropriate information, but it does not mean you have to give them information you would rather keep private.

This is a perfectly reasonable response to a child's question:

"I can certainly understand why you would ask that question, and I am glad you feel comfortable asking me things like this. The truth is, the answer is private and a bit embarrassing, so I am not going to answer it today. Let me think about how I would like to respond and get back to you."

It is okay to buy time to collect your thoughts.

It's also okay to come back and say,

"I've thought about it, and I'd rather keep that part of my life private for now. You can check back with me in the future and maybe I'll be ready to talk about it, or maybe I won't."

We all have a right to privacy, *and this includes our children*. We cannot make our kids talk to us. However, when we model having clear boundaries around what we share *and* are honest in the process, we set the stage for healthy relationships in which our children will feel safe to share their innermost thoughts and feelings with us. They will enjoy sharing with us because they will get feedback that is useful and they will get it in a relationship that feels respectful, supportive and loving.

But what if your child asks you a question and you don't know how to answer?

Throughout their years, and certainly as they grow into teenagers, our children will come to us with questions we don't know how to answer. They may be embarrassing or shocking, and we can worry about saying the wrong thing.

This is where **scripts** come into play. Scripts are exactly what they sound like. They are the text of what we are going to say in various situations that might otherwise cause us to panic and flub our responses. Writing scripts helps us choose our words carefully because we have already thought our answers through.

So what should we say when our children ask us questions that we are not prepared to answer? Here is a great script to try:

"You deserve a really good answer to that question, and I want to give you one. The truth is, I'm not sure how to answer that question right now. I'm glad you asked, though, because I do want to talk to you about it. I just need a little time to think about what I want to say in order to give you a really great answer. If I don't bring it up by tomorrow afternoon, ask me again, and I promise I will have an answer for you."

Then, go do some research and script out your answer. And remember, you can always buy more time during the conversation if it gets to a point that you don't know what to say. If you are committed to being your child's best source of information, you will find plenty of resources that help you figure out an appropriate response.

The second, and perhaps most important component of leveling with your children is this ...

Tell the Truth About How You Feel

Oftentimes, parents try to protect their kids from the truth about how they are feeling. They think it is better not to burden their kids with their own emotions. Parents don't want to put their kids in the middle of arguments, so they tell them everything is fine, even when it isn't. Other times, they don't want to scare their children or put their own big feelings on the plate of their young, innocent child.

We don't want to tell our kids we are scared about the economy, sad about the state of the world, or angry with someone in the household, so we paint a rosy picture for them.

The problem is: Your kids can feel when something is off with you. They can feel the undercurrent of your emotions in their guts. We humans are wired to sense other people's emotions, and our children are especially attuned to our moods and feelings.

Telling them you are fine when they can feel you are upset puts them in the awful position of having to choose between trusting themselves or trusting you. This is a position you never want to put your children in.

Level with your children. Give your kids honest information in a way that doesn't force them to make that choice between trusting you and trusting themselves. Level with them so they can trust you and they can trust themselves.

When children cannot get accurate information from their parents, they feel really insecure about what is real and true. As stated before, if you sugar coat or dance around issues, or if you lie to your children, one of two things will happen: They will either believe you, and stop trusting themselves, or they will stop trusting you.

Kids need to be able to count on their parents to be the source of how the world works and what is happening in the world and in the household. Try as hard as you can to never put them in a position where they have to make a choice to either trust themselves or trust you.

Again, this does not mean you have to share details you would rather keep private. You don't even have to tell them why you are feeling the way you are feeling, but do admit to the feeling.

It's okay to say something like this if your child asks why you seem sad or angry:

"You're right. I am upset right now. The reason is private, and I don't want to talk about it, but it has absolutely nothing to do with you. I love you and I appreciate you asking how I feel. I know how to take care of myself, and I am quite sure I'll feel better about this very soon."

Telling the truth about how you feel, even when you do not share details about what's causing your emotions, lets your children know they can trust you and trust themselves. Relationships built on trust thrive.

How Does This Strategy Help Build Rich Family Capital?

As a thoughtful, successful, loving parent, you have wisdom to share with your children.* You have learned valuable lessons over the years and grown in your personal, professional, financial and spiritual life. These experiences have crystalized into a set of values you would like to pass along to your children so they are better positioned for success and happiness in their own lives.

When your children know you are an accurate source of information and you will level with them, you become a more powerful role model. When you give your children plenty of honest information, they will trust you, and they will come to you for advice. When they experience for themselves the truth of what you say, they will be more likely to believe that your wisdom, values, and opinions are relevant and meaningful for them.

Leveling with your children puts you in the position of trusted ally and sets a foundation for a lifetime of good communication.

* How do we know you are thoughtful, successful and loving?

Because you are reading this.

ACTIVITY 1: Initiate an Awkward Conversation

Over the course of their lifetimes, our children will come to us with questions we don't know how to answer. These questions can be embarrassing, they can be shocking, and we can worry about saying the wrong thing.

But remember: **You** are your children's most important source of information about how the world works. If you do not give them information about everything (and this includes the awkward stuff), they will likely seek it somewhere else, and the information they receive may not be in alignment with your values or your life philosophy.

So if you want a resilient, strong relationship with your children, be the person who always tells your children the truth—no matter the subject matter.

This activity helps you break through discomfort by initiating a conversation with your child about a subject that makes you uncomfortable. It works like this:

1. First, decide what conversation you should start.

Consider the conversations you have been avoiding. Every parent has different comfort levels on the various topics that could come up. Some can talk freely about sex, sexual orientation, and alcohol use but struggle with conversations about death, suicide, or religion and spirituality.

2. Then, think about what you will say.

Because every family's value system is different, we cannot tell you what to say, but we do have one rule ... *What you say must be truthful.*

Remember, your children need to rely on you to explain to them how the world works. If you are struggling to find words, do a little research online. Ask friends. Eventually, you will find a strategy that aligns with your values.

3. Finally, write a script.

Scripts are exactly what they sound like. They are the text of what we are going to say in various situations that might otherwise cause us to panic and flub our responses. Writing scripts helps us choose words carefully because we have already thought our answers through.

► **TIP:** Don't try to do this in one, big "talk." Instead, frame this as the beginning of an ongoing, open dialog that evolves as your child grows.



DOWNLOAD ACTIVITY 1: www.macdermottmethod.com/YourName

ACTIVITY #1

Initiate an Awkward Conversation

Leveling with children can be difficult. Over the course of their lifetimes, our children will come to us with questions that we don't know how to answer. These questions can be embarrassing or shocking, and we can worry about saying the wrong thing.

But remember, you are your children's most important source of information about how the world works. If you don't give them information

about everything, including the awkward stuff, they will likely seek it somewhere else. And the information they receive may not be in alignment with your values or life philosophy.

Initiating a conversation around an awkward subject allows you to get ahead of things before your children seek information elsewhere and helps you practice leveling with them even when it is uncomfortable doing so.

AN AWKWARD CONVERSATION

1. Identify the topic you want to talk about

Consider the conversations you've been avoiding. Every parent has different comfort levels on the various topics that could come up. Some can talk freely about sex, sexual orientation, and alcohol use but struggle with conversations about death, suicide, religion or spirituality.

What is a subject you've been avoiding?

2. Use your values to consider what you want to say

This differs with every family. The only rule is: Be truthful. Remember, your children need to rely on you to explain to them how the world works. If you struggle to find words, do some research online or ask friends. Eventually, you will find a strategy that works for you.

What are some bullet points you want to remember to cover?

3. Write your script (or at least finalize your bullet points)

Remember: Don't try to do this in one, big "talk." Instead, frame it as the beginning of an ongoing, open dialog that evolves as your children grow.
