



## PART 2

# FACES, NOT DEVICES, AT THE TABLE

By Carol Stock Kranowitz, MA

**M**ealtime! Let's turn off all electronic devices and park them in a basket. Let's sit at the table and look at one another. Let's talk.

To help everyone participate more during family meals, entertain introducing these ten ideas to strengthen communication and social skills. (Ten other ideas are in the May-July 2026 issue of *Autism Digest*. Hope those Conversation Seeds and Passion Topics have been working well for you!) Make it a habit to play a face-to-face game every day.

### “W” QUESTIONS

Lucy Jane Miller, PhD, OTR, FAOTA, founder of The STAR Institute and author of *Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with SPD*, suggests asking “W” questions. These are What, Who, When, Where, Whom, Whither, and How (originally spelled “Whow”). Going around the table in order or randomly, everyone gets to ask a question. Lucy advises, “Don’t ask ‘Why’ because that’s really hard to answer!”

Somebody makes a statement, such as, “I saw someone doing something odd today.” Others at the table ask W questions to learn about what happened. For example:

What did you see?  
Who was doing it?  
When did you see it?  
Where were you?  
Whom were you with?  
Whither did you go afterwards?  
How did you respond? or, How did you feel about what you saw?

Asking W questions helps kids develop the skill of listening to other folks to learn about their experiences, responses, emotions, etc. Successful students, writers and researchers focus on these questions in their work. Now is a good time to practice.

### HOW DO YOU GET TO 81?

This is one of my favorite questions. You may get answers like these:  
Nine times nine.  
100 take away 16 plus four squared.  
You can pick it (Route 81) up near Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre, or Scranton.  
Ooh, I just had my 81st birthday and have no idea how I got here!

### QUESTIONS THAT “YES” OR “NO” CAN’T ANSWER

Seth Warner, the father of three young adults, suggests asking questions that require more than a monosyllabic “Yes,” “No,” or “Good.” Instead of asking a broad question about how school went today, ask a specific question, such as, “In your Driver’s Ed class, what are you learning about the ‘Right on Red’ rules?”

### THINK PINK

Julia Berry, MA, former Head of St. Columba’s Nursery School in Washington, DC, enjoys this challenging rhyming game with her word-loving family. One person comes up with two rhyming words and ties them together with a definition. The person says, “Think pink” for 1-syllable words, “Thinky-pinky” for 2-syllable words, and “Thinkety-pinkety” for 3-syllable words. The other people at the table (or in the car) must think hard!

**Easiest: A pair of 1-syllable rhyming words and a definition — Examples:**

Say, “Think pink: chubby feline.” (Fat Cat)  
Say, “Think pink: tidy road.” (Neat Street)

Say, “Think pink: very warm saucepan.” (Hot Pot)

**Hard: A pair of 2-syllable rhyming words and a definition — Examples:**

Say, “Thinky-pinky: hilarious cash.” (Funny Money)  
Say, “Thinky-pinky: royal hunting dog.” (Regal Beagle)  
Say, “Thinky-pinky: movement in the sea.” (Ocean Motion)

**Very hard: A pair of 3-syllable rhyming words and a definition — Examples:**

Say, “Thinkety-pinkety: ceramics raffle.” (Pottery Lottery)  
Say, “Thinkety-pinkety: a gazelle’s favorite melon.” (Antelope Cantaloupe)  
Say, “Thinkety-pinkety: devotion to the king’s family.” (Royalty Loyalty)

### TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Rondalyn V. Whitney, PhD, OTR/L, author of *Raising Kids with Sensory Processing Disorders*, plays this game that kids enjoy and parents appreciate because they learn a lot about their children’s school life, interests, worries, and perspectives. Everyone around the table reports three things that happened during the day, two that are true and one that is not. The listeners guess which statement is a lie. Example: “We had a math test. I ate all my sandwich, even the crusts and lettuce, and the carrots and raisins, too. The music teacher let us try different instruments, and I want to play the violin.”

### WHAT IF?

My father, Herman Stock, strongly believed that children should be encouraged to wonder. He played this game with his daughters and grandchildren to stretch our imaginations and interact with us at the table. Ask your child an open-ended question that you can’t answer and that has no right or wrong answers. Examples: “What if sidewalks were conveyor belts? It never rained? Everybody looked exactly alike? We didn’t have electricity? You were on a desert isle and could have only three things?” (Note: The very opposite of catastrophizing that many children with autism and SPD tend to do, this “What Ifing” activity is positive, imaginative, and fun.)

### ADD-A-LINE

Another of my father’s games was starting a story and going around the table, with each person adding a line that includes a word or phrase just

spoken. Example: “Once upon a time, a little girl realized she had magical powers.” The next person might say, “The little girl realized that when she turned around three times, her feet lifted an inch off the ground.” The third person might say, “With her feet off the ground, she could float over puddles and down the stairs.”

### WHAT I LIKE ABOUT YOU

Kaitlyn Tiplady, PhD, M.Ed., a clinical psychologist working with neurodivergent individuals of all ages, and her family take turns at the dinner table saying three things they appreciate about each family member. She loves instituting gratitude practice, and this is a structured way to provide praise to her kids. She offers these examples: “I love the sound of Benjamin’s giggles,” and “Anne is the best at sharing her toys with Benjamin.”

### FOOD PREPARATION

“Have children help to make dinner,” advises Jennifer Pleasure, PsyD, a psychologist working with young children and their parents. Then the kids are more invested in the meal. They may think the food they concocted tastes scrumptious, and they may be interested in whether others agree.

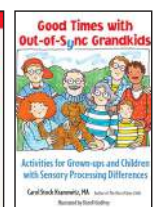
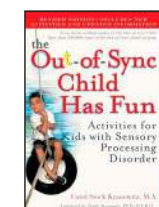
### EAT MESSY FOODS

To keep kids’ hands off their devices (if children sneak them to the table), serve messy food. Jeremy Kranowitz, President and CEO of Keep Indianapolis Beautiful and father of

three sensational kids (full disclosure: my grandchildren!), suggests serving for dinner such favorites as chicken wings, barbecued ribs, corn on the cob, tacos, and crabs smothered with Old Bay seasoning — along with a lot of napkins. ■



Carol is the author of the “Sync” series, including *The Out-of-Sync Child Has Fun* (Perigee, 2006) and *Good Times with Out-of-Sync Grandkids* (Sensory World, 2025).



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