To launch into a meaningful conversation with your middle school, high school and adult kids, avoid questions that can be answered with yes or no. Instead, try some of these open- ended prompts that cannot be responded to with one-word answers.

- **Tell me about _____?** Asking intelligent questions about their areas of expertise allows them to be THE expert! Let them tell you about their job, their career field, and why they love it.
- **Tell me more about what you do each day in your job…**how are your co-workers? How do you handle challenging people? What makes you excited to get up each morning?
- **What do you think about _____?**
- **What does a typical day look like for you?** We used this around the dinner table with two of our adult kids a few months ago, and they loved sharing their days and hearing about each other's days as well.
- **How is _____?** My kids are always grateful when I remember names and ask about their friends.
- **What do you remember about _____?** (There's nothing wrong with **a quick reminder of your shared family history**!)
- **How did you know how to handle ____person/situation____ or what to do?** This will show them that you admire them and want to learn from them. Plus, it will set you up to be able to encourage them!
- **Ask their advice — and be sure to tell them what it is about them that makes you specifically want their advice.** (This demonstrates that you realize your relationship is evolving and acknowledges that they have wisdom to share that is valuable to you.)
- **After your adult child shares about an upcoming plan, event or new career choice…**Tell me more about it. What made you decide to choose this? What do you think it will look Like?
- **If money was no object, what would you want to do in the world?**
- **Tell me about how you experience God in the world? Or substitute higher power, etc. Where do you feel most peaceful?**

Ask permission to share your own experiences on a given topic, make sure you are just talking about yourself and not trying to tell them what to do. So much can be learned from simply sitting with someone to hear their story. To listen to their experiences without interruption, without offering solutions, without judgment. Often, what people are seeking most when they share about difficult experiences is to just feel truly heard.

Here are some ideas for how to practice active listening the next time someone shares with you about a personal challenge:

- Instead of offering solutions, ask open-ended questions that help you understand their experience, like "What's on your mind? or "What has been hard this week?"
- As you're listening, check your understanding by reflecting back the emotions you hear. Try something like: "Figuring how to balance school and friends can be tough." Or "It sounds like not knowing what comes next has been scary." Or "Juggling medical appointments and parenting sounds really draining."