

# Talking about Difficult or Tough Topics



## 1. Time and Place....

Give consideration to how to begin the conversation, where it should take place and how to discuss it so that your child will listen. If your child brings up a difficult or challenging topic, create a space that is safe to talk where you are present, mindful and patient.

## 2. Find out what your child already knows

You might simply ask, "What have you heard about \_\_\_?" especially if your child asks you a difficult question (about sex, death, politics, etc.). This allows your child to tell you what they understand — or misunderstand — and perhaps what concerns are prompting their question.

## 3. Keep your answers simple, truthful, reassuring and age appropriate.

### Think about the message you want your child to receive

Be clear and give answers that are honest and appropriate for your child's age. Often one simple sentence may be enough. Know that sometimes the answer to their question is "I don't know." For example, "Why did the bad people do this?" "I don't know".

Underneath a child's question, they are often worried about how the subject impacts them. For example, if they are worried about safety, offer reassurance. You might describe the different ways they are safe and say, "You have great defenses - your teeth, your yelling voice and your nails," or "Police officers are here to protect us." Reassure them that they are healthy, safe and loved.

## 4. Stay calm, listen mindfully and *please* be patient

Listen with an ear for what is of concern for your child and note/address misperceptions. Don't dismiss their questions and please be mindful of not just your response, but your body language as well. Be careful to not pass along your fears, anxiety or emotions.

For some add'l support:

- 1) American Psychological Association [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)
- 2) Scholastic [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com)
- 3) Common Sense Media [www.commonsensemedia.org](http://www.commonsensemedia.org)

## 5. Reassure child and ask more questions

There is often no right answer to children's questions. Be giving with your love and support. Be curious and open minded. For example, if your child asks you about people being injured on the news, you might say, "I feel sad those people got hurt. How do you feel?"

## 6. Talk again. Remind your child that they can get through hard things

Be prepared for children to bring up the same question many times. This is natural and means they are continuing to process the issue and may need more information. Additionally, keep an eye on your child. If they seem to be having trouble coping, open the conversation again and offer additional information and support. **Remind your child of their growth mindset and they can sit with hard feelings and get through hard things. They are stronger than they think! Let them know that!**

## 7. Limit media exposure

Be mindful of child's exposure to media images, alerts and news feeds.

## 8. If needed, utilize resources

Things like books, movies, reputable websites...and even trusted people like grandparents, beloved neighbors, teachers, me ☺ .....are great resources for support!

## 9. Self care. Use and model using your tools

When children can sense courage in us, they too will not be afraid. We need to manage our own anxieties. Take deep breaths and remember this can be a positive interaction.