



Having Difficult Conversations with Kids

Parenting kids is stressful on a good day. During times of traumatic loss this stress can rise to a whole new level for caregivers who may feel unprepared to respond to children during these critical times. Fortunately, the same basic foundations of parenting apply. Kids need safety, stability, and security from the trusted adults in their lives.

- ✓ **SAFETY:** Kids need to know they are physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually safe.
- ✓ **STABILITY:** Kids do best in an environment that provides predictability. Especially during times of change, it helps when a few basic things are still the same, even small things (i.e., their favorite cereal every morning for breakfast even if they are waking up in a different house).
- ✓ **SECURITY:** Kids need one or more healthy attachments to trustworthy adults.

There are times when disruptions to these three things will occur. Taking steps to restore them or create them provides children with the space they need to process difficult thoughts, feelings, adjust to changes in their lives, and build the relationships and skills they need to continue to live healthy childhoods.

Tips for Talking to Children about Difficult Things

1. Remember your basic goals include that your child knows they are loved, safe, secure and will be heard.
2. Get consent. Create time and space and ask if it is okay to have an important conversation. Determine a signal that your child can use to let you know when they need to pause; take a breath; absorb what has been said; or when their available bandwidth to have this conversation has maxed out for now.
3. Think about what you want to say to them about the situation and then condense it into a few sentences. Periodically pause and check for understanding.
4. Tell the truth and use correct vocabulary. Refrain from making up information.
5. Share curiosity and exploration. Join children in considering possible answers to their questions rather than supplying them.



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6. Should they ask a question for which there is no certain answer responses such as, "Good question. I don't know. I wonder about that, too." provides validation. Asking "What do you think?" gives more information about what is going on in their heads.
7. Keep the conversations short and let them know they can talk about it with you as often as they want/need.
8. Allow them to move their bodies while talking. This helps them regulate their emotions and keeps them engaged. Movement is not a sign of disinterest or lack of focus.
9. End the conversation with easy grounding practices like taking 3 deep belly breaths and offering a hug.
10. Tell your child you are proud of them and validate their courage to have had this conversation. Reaffirm your belief that your child, your family, and yourself will be able to cope well with this current challenge and leave the door open for continued conversation.

You are Not Alone

Know there are available resources to you and your children.

- Hosparus Health Grief Counseling Center: [HosparusHealth.org](https://www.HosparusHealth.org)
 - 502-456-5451 or 1-888-345-8197
- Your child's Pediatrician
- Your child's school: School Counselor, Youth Services or Family Resource Coordinator, and your child's Mental Health Professional
- National Alliance for Grieving Children: [NACG.org](https://www.NACG.org)
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [NCTSN.org](https://www.NCTSN.org)