

How to Have Difficult Conversations with Your Child



Talking to children about difficult topics, for example, when we have to share some bad news or if there has been an upsetting event (for example, in the family, the local area or in the news) or any other topic, can be a difficult task but may well be necessary and important for your child and can bring your relationship closer together.

Why it's good to talk

Our children are precious to us. We all want them to grow up in a safe and loving environment and become happy, confident adults. To get there they need to be surrounded by positive influences, good advice and the knowledge that if they ever need help and support there will be someone to talk to.

As a parent, it's you who they'll look to for help. And, as they're your child, it's up to you to talk to them when you think they might need a nudge in the right direction or to share news or information that's going to affect their lives.

Source: NSPCC

Below are some tips that may be helpful to you:

- Be aware of your conversations, discussion of or exposure to news. Children are often listening to us or the TV/radio even when in the background or when they seem to be busy with other things; older children may be hearing/seeing more than we think from the internet, TV and social media (and their peers).
- Be watchful for children showing they know something. Of course, some children will talk about subjects directly but you may also hear them talking about it during their play or you may notice they seem more anxious, needing more reassurance or cuddles or showing other signs that something is on their mind.
- Time - it could be a short or a long conversation so avoid evenings when you and your child may be tired or something else is about to happen which could cut your time short
- Place – you may want to talk to siblings separately to be able to respond individually or together. Often children will open up whilst they are doing another activity or in a neutral space like on a

walk or in the car. Some children also find it easier to talk positioned side by side rather than face to face.

- Create 'distance' by asking how other children might feel, what they might be worried about or what questions they might have. Even though they are talking about someone else they are likely talking about themselves.
- Try to listen, listen, listen. We naturally want our children to feel safe and secure and can rush to reassure them too early before we have given them time to fully explain what they mean.
- Acknowledge what they have said and giving them opportunity to say more e.g. 'So you're saying _____ (repeat in child's words), can you tell me more about that?'
- Show that you accept their feelings/thoughts, even if they are not fully realistic or accurate e.g. 'It makes sense to me that you/children would be worried about XX, think about XXX, wonder about XXX.'
- Encourage and be prepared for multiple conversations, some children may want to return to the topic (and some won't), some will share more or have more questions later
- Explaining what has happened – try to respond to a child's questions as simply as possible, if they need more detail they will usually ask for it. Use familiar references and as simple language as you can.
- Distinguish between "real" and "pretend." Young children in particular have rich fantasy lives and mix up make-believe and reality. They may ask you if it is really true. Be honest, but don't feel you need to over-explain.
- Affirm facts that keep children/family/friends safe. It's important for children to know they're safe, their family is OK, and someone is taking care of the problem.



If you would like some more help or support, please do contact us.