

Tips for Talking About the Tough Stuff

Challenges big and small are a part of life. Young people need guidance, support, and care as they navigate these challenges. We don't always know what to say or even what to do. (That's part of life, too!) The suggestions below can be helpful for you, no matter what challenge you are navigating alongside a young person. We are trying to be present, not perfect.



FIRST, CHECK IN WITH YOURSELF

Two helpful questions to ask yourself before you start a conversation with a child are: **How am I feeling? What do I need?** Remember that you too are having an experience that will include a full range of emotions. **Take a few deep breaths and acknowledge any feelings you are having.** The goal is to come into the conversation in a regulated, curious, and open state of mind.



ASK HELPFUL QUESTIONS

We need to understand the perspective of the young person. **Ask open-ended questions which are aimed at learning more about the youth's experience.** These are not yes/no questions. It can be helpful to think ahead of time about what questions you'd like to ask to get the conversation started.



GO SLOW, REFLECT & LISTEN WITH CURIOSITY

The best way to keep the youth talking is to show them that you are listening. Notice your body language. Watch your pacing. Slow down. Some silence is totally okay! **Reflect back what you hear.** Listen from a curious space, not one in which you think you already know the answer. Remember that what a young person does often fulfills an important need, so listen carefully for needs.



LABEL & SUPPORT YOUTH EMOTIONS

Highlight any emotions your young person shares and ask them about their emotional experience. This helps them build important skills. You can also make educated guesses about how your child might feel, if you've asked and they aren't sure. **Let the young person know that their feelings make sense and are an important part of life.**



EDUCATE YOURSELF & SHARE INFORMATION

We never know what a youth might come home and say, or what they will experience (with peers, technology, social media, safety, mental health challenges or more). It is important to take the initiative to **seek out information we might be missing to be helpful and share accurate, developmentally appropriate information.** This enables us to work together to help youth.



TALK EARLY, TALK OFTEN

We can't expect hard conversations to go well if the only conversations we have are hard! **Start having casual conversations with the child about issues big and small.** Make connection a routine in your family.



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