



# Tips for Talking With Kids About Difficult Topics



Enhancing the health and well-being of Barrington area children and youth in mind, body, and spirit.

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Talking with your kids about difficult topics is one of the most challenging parts of being a parent. It's not easy for any parent, but here are some tips to help.

## Tips for talking with kids about difficult topics:

- Start talking early and often to build a relationship of trust and open communication with your children when they are young. This will make it easier and more natural for them to come to you when difficult situations arise as they get older.
- Create a safe environment where your children feel free to ask questions, share their worries and concerns, and express their thoughts, feelings and opinions.
- Follow your child's lead and talk with him or her in a developmentally appropriate way.
- Ask questions and encourage open dialogue, giving space for conversation.
- Listen.
- If they share something that was hard to say, start by thanking them for trusting you.
- Acknowledge, address, and help them to name their feelings. This critical skill will help them to better identify, express, and regulate their emotions as they grow.
- Share your personal and family values.
- Be honest, patient and curious. Try to respond with empathy and compassion.
- Sometimes it helps to have side-by-side conversations in the car, while out for a walk or lying on your back in the grass or on the bed. Talking while engaged in an activity like playing ball or watching a movie can also help your child to open up by removing the pressure of sitting face-to-face with direct eye contact.
- Talk about solutions and how to handle a difficult situation. Role-playing can be helpful to practice what to do or say in a challenging situation.
- Remember that it's ok to say, "This is hard," or "I don't know," or "I'm not sure how to answer that. I need to think about it or learn more." Then ask, "Could we try to find the answer together?" or "Can we talk about it again when I have more information?" Set a date and time to revisit the topic.
- Be on the lookout for everyday opportunities to talk – in the car or on a walk, when they are getting ready for bed or after watching a movie together. Opportunities to talk about difficult subjects present themselves in natural ways every day.
- For younger children, books can be a great way to start an important conversation.
- Revisit difficult topics as they grow. Remember, it isn't one 60-minute conversation, it's 60, one-minute conversations that make a difference.
- Reassure them that they are safe and loved and can talk to you at any time, regardless of the subject. It is important that they know that no topic is off-limits to come to you for help, support, to process their thoughts or for advice.

Remember to lead with love. Creating connection with your child, whether they are young or during the more challenging years of being a teenager, is the ultimate goal. Regardless of the conversation, always bring it back to how much you love them and that you are there for them whenever they need you.

For additional tips for talking about mental health, stress, underage drinking, healthy relationships and more, visit [www.bstrongtogether.org/time-2-talk](http://www.bstrongtogether.org/time-2-talk).