

How to Talk to Your Children

7 tips when discussing news and turbulent events

As a parent, we have several important responsibilities to our children. We want to give them everything they need to grow and develop. We want to protect them, educate them and prepare them to live as independent, fully functioning individuals. So, as parents, what can we do to protect our children from the sometimes, harsh realities of the world while preparing them to live in it?

Current events, such as the recent racial protests and turmoil occurring in major cities across the United States, can have

an impact on your children. In our society of mass and immediate communication, our children are privy to news events, violence, the strong opinions of others and the presentation of both factual and false information. There is, therefore, a clear need to sit down with your child/children to discuss what is occurring and find out how they may be impacted. **Please keep in mind the following when talking to your children about these and other difficult matters:**



1. **Start early.** The earlier you start having these conversations, the better. This is your chance to create lifelong habits of open communication and sharing in your family. If you have an older child, it is never too late to start. Children of any age need someone they love and trust to go to when life is hard and confusing. Having these discussions now makes it more likely that your child will come to you in the future when they are experiencing their own painful, personal life issues.
2. **Ask them what they already know.** Starting with what they already know will help guide you in the discussion to meet their needs. Then listen to them. What are their fears? Are there things that they are confused about? This can help you gauge whether there are facts you need to clarify, and where they are in their learning and development. Starting with what they know will help you determine what needs to be discussed, and what they are ready to discuss.

3. **Consider your child's age, developmental stage and personality.** You are the expert regarding your child and knowing what they are ready to hear. A younger child cannot handle or understand the same discussion that an adolescent can. However, that doesn't mean an older child can't experience confusion, fear, or have concerns about what they are seeing and hearing. As the expert on your child, you may want to prepare for the conversation by thinking about what they are ready to hear. You may also want to think about what questions they could have in advance.
4. **Be available and be willing to have hard conversations with your children.** Children will hear about the world from friends, teachers, online, and through social media. In fact, events such as protests or demonstrations may be occurring where you live, and your children may be experiencing them first-hand or at least witnessing the after effects. As a parent, take this opportunity to be a powerful voice in your child's life. You are their guide and their life advisor. While situations like these are tragic, they provide a chance for you to share your worldview, as well as provide facts related to these events. Not having the hard discussions may cause your child to fill in the blanks themselves, and that is often with fear or non-factual information from peers or social media. Though these discussions may bring some discomfort and even make you aware of your own biases regarding certain topics, be open to listening. When you **listen first**, you are better equipped to make decisions about what you will **then share**.
5. **Set aside specific time to have this discussion.** Doing so will give the conversation importance and demonstrate to your child how important they are to you, as well. Setting aside a time with minimal distractions will lend to more meaningful, honest and open discussion. Older children may challenge or disagree with your views, which may be developmentally appropriate. In fact, if they do feel comfortable enough to do so, feel confident that you have created a safe space for them to talk to you about difficult topics.
6. **Children need more time to process information.** Depending on their age and developmental stage, your child may simply take in what you choose to share with them and communicate very little about it first. Don't assume that your child understood or had no questions or feelings about what you shared. Be prepared to revisit the discussion in a day or two, check in, and give them an opportunity to ask questions or share how they feel.

7. **Be open and honest.** It is healthy for your child to know that you have feelings, and that you, too, can react to painful events in the world. Expressing your vulnerability will normalize their feelings and even give them permission to feel a certain way. If the discussion is entirely intellectual, then you most likely only scratched the surface of what your child may be experiencing. As the parent, you will set the boundaries regarding how much you want to share, and what is beneficial for your child to see you express.

Though we do our best to protect our children from the fear and uncertainty of the news, difficult situations in our community, or tumultuous times for the world at large, it still impacts our children. Providing a safe place and quiet time for your child/children to talk with you, sharing your own feelings, and giving the message that they can talk to you about anything, can reduce their anxiety and concern. **Please remember that your Ulliance EAP has counselors available for you and your dependents to discuss any issues that you may be addressing during this time.**

Want to learn more?

How to talk to your kids about racial bias, divorce, disasters, sex and more:

American Pediatrics Association www.HealthyChildren.org

How to talk to children about difficult news:

American Psychological Association

www.apa.org/topics/talking-children

How to talk to your kids about substance abuse:

SAMSHA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

www.samhsa.gov/underage-drinking/parent-resources/answering-your-childs-tough-questions



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counseling for you & your family.**

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