TALKING TOUGH TOPICS

Children have a lot of stuff to deal with in today’s world: Sex. Drugs. Bullying. Death. The list goes on and on. It can leave parents feeling scared, uncomfortable and overwhelmed. But talking openly with your children is critical to their healthy development and will help foster open and ongoing communication.

Try different methods and figure out what works best for your family. Consider reaching out for support by attending a parenting group or using the “Village” approach and asking another trusted adult to talk to your child when you can’t get through.

WHY is it so important to talk about these issues?

If you don’t talk to your children about the serious issues they may face in life, you can be sure someone else will. And it may be a child or even adult providing misinformation and negative influence. If possible, parents should be the FIRST person bringing up tough topics, so they can provide a foundation of honesty and support.

WHEN should I talk with my child?

Start talking with your kids as early as possible so that they feel safe bringing up subjects (like sex and drugs) in the future if/when they have more questions. No matter how old your child might be, you can begin to address challenging issues right away by being a good listener, modeling positive communication skills and valuing honesty. Your child’s age is less important than his or her environment (is this coming up at school and with friends?) and maturity. If he’s watching movies that show drug use, for example, then it’s definitely time for that subject to come up in family conversation.

WHAT should I do to keep our talks productive when I’m upset about what my child is saying?

It’s critical that parents remain open to what their children have to say. If you immediately get angry, criticize or yell at them, they will shut down. And that can mean they won’t come to you in the future when they are scared, confused or considering risky behavior.

HOW can I start a conversation without making my child (or me!) feel uncomfortable?

- Use TV shows, video games, books, news stories, etc. to first bring up the subject, and so your children can relate it to their own life.
- Role play by acting out a situation to learn how your child might react, taking turns so you can model an appropriate/healthy response as well.
- Do not judge, get angry or yell while talking. You don’t want to scare your children and make them NOT want to talk with you. Try to remain calm and listen quietly when they share.
- Be selective about using “why” questions, which might make them go on the defensive.
- Talk about an end point so your child knows the conversation (which may be uncomfortable) will not go on forever. Chat while walking the dog or making a trip to the grocery store.
- Try using tools, such as “conversation cards” at the dinner table (check out The UnGame or “Time to Talk” cards at samhsa.gov); the National Education Association’s “Can We Talk” program; or The Library Association’s daybydayva.org site.

START TALKING TODAY!

Check out the great “Conversation Starters” on the next page or learn more online at www.scanva.org/prc
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Try ANY of these conversation starters when they feel relevant and age-appropriate for you and your child. Don't wait - start talking today, and do it every day!

Learn more online at SCAN's Parent Resource Center: www.scanva.org/prc