



TALKING ABOUT TOUGH TOPICS

It is common for kids as young as elementary school to start hearing about drugs, sex, video games, suicide, and other tough topics. Parents might feel scared or uncomfortable when these issues come up, but talking with you helps them feel safe, establish their own boundaries, and helps strengthen your relationship.

WHY talk about these issues?

If you don't talk to your children about the serious issues they bring up, someone else will. (And it may be a child or adult providing false information or 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?

As early as possible! You can begin right away by asking questions, being a good listener, and valuing (not punishing!) honesty. Your child's age is less important than his or her environment, experience, and maturity. If they bring up a topic, it's definitely time to talk.

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

Remain open to what your child has to say. If you get angry, criticize, or yell at them, they may shut down. And that can mean they won't come to you in the future when they are scared, confused or considering risky behavior.

When you get a chance to talk, CONSIDER:

1. Have you reminded them you care (a lot)?
2. Have you assessed their understanding?
3. Have you asked about their feelings?
4. Have you been honest?
5. Have you kept your emotions in check?

How to start a conversation without making your child uncomfortable:

- Use TV shows, video games, books, news stories, etc.** to bring up the subject, and so your children can relate it to their own life.
- Do not judge, get angry or yell while talking.** You don't want to scare your children. 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.