



## Discussing **Difficult Topics** with Your Child

**Y**our child may ask difficult questions about topics, ranging from violence to drugs, divorce and death. As parents, it may be difficult to find the right words to respond to your child's questions in an age-appropriate way. Here are a few things to consider when difficult questions and topics arise:

- **Be careful about the types of conversations you have around your child.** While you may not think your child is listening and paying attention, they may be taking in the entire conversation (and ask you about it at a random time when you are least expecting it).
- **Start by listening.** Ask your child what they know about the question or topic, and really listen to what they are saying and try to understand why they are asking the question.
- **It's okay to take some time to plan a response.** Feel free to tell your child that you need to think about it first or you need to find the answer yourself, and then you can talk about it in a little while. This can give you a little time to formulate your thoughts, gather information and decide how you want to respond.
- **Be honest with your child, even when it may be uncomfortable.** Your child may have already

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heard others talking about the topic and have some knowledge on it (which may or may not be accurate). You want your child to trust that you will provide accurate and honest information so your child comes to you first when they have questions or want to understand something.

- **Reassure your child that you (and other trusted adults) will do everything possible to make sure that they stay safe.** For example, your child may hear about a natural disaster, such as a tornado, or a crime, such as a shooting, and worry that they are in danger. Explain to your child that it's adults' jobs to keep kids safe. You might consider providing examples to help your child understand what you mean. For example, parents lock house doors and seek shelter during tornado watches. Bad things occasionally happen, and fortunately, these situations are rare.
- **Share family values and beliefs in these conversations.** You can explain your values and beliefs to your child in kid-friendly terms. You can also acknowledge that other people and families may have different values and beliefs, though one set of values and beliefs isn't necessarily right or wrong.



- **Follow your child's lead in terms of how much information to provide.** If your child is able to formulate the question, they know enough about the topic and understand it well enough to be asking the question. Try to provide a brief and direct response that's age-appropriate.
- **In the future, you might consider casually bringing up the topic again and asking your child if they have any more questions.** This would send the message that you care, remember and are willing to continue the conversation.

➞ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **BoysTown.org/Parenting** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.

