

# Ask an Expert – Six Tips for Addressing Tough Topics with Your Kids

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Talking to kids about difficult subjects – such as loss, mental health, life changes, or national and world events – can be intimidating. However, fostering open communication is key to building trust and helping them navigate life’s complexities. Drawing from Dr. John Gottman’s research on emotional intelligence and Brené Brown’s work on vulnerability, here are six practical tips to help parents guide these conversations.

1. **Create the right environment.** Choose a calm, private setting free from distractions. Sitting together on the couch or walking can set a relaxed tone.
2. **Start simple and honest.** Begin with clear, age-appropriate language. For example, “I want to talk about something important. Have you ever heard about...?”
3. **Listen actively.** Engage with your child by making eye contact and reflecting their feelings: “It sounds like you’re upset because...” This makes them feel heard and valued.
4. **Embrace vulnerability.** Share age-appropriate stories about your experiences and struggles to model resilience. Showing them it’s okay to feel uncertain or scared fosters courage and empathy. Model vulnerability and show honesty in your interactions. Kids learn by example, so model the behavior you wish to see.
5. **Help them problem-solve.** Guide your child in finding solutions rather than providing all the answers. Brainstorm together to build their confidence and independence.

6. **Build a culture of communication.** Have regular check-ins. Discuss feelings as a regular part of family life, such as having regular chats around the dinner table. Celebrate their courage by praising their efforts when they open up about sensitive topics.

Discussing difficult topics with your kids can feel overwhelming, but it’s an opportunity to strengthen your relationship with them and equip them with essential life skills. These moments become meaningful and transformative by fostering open communication and cultivating emotional intelligence.

For additional parenting resources, visit [Child Mind Institute](#).

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