

Conversation Starters

OFTEN, CAREGIVERS KNOW WHAT THEY WANT TO TALK ABOUT, BUT CAN'T DECIDE HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION. HERE ARE SOME IDEAS TO GET STARTED!

USE "TEACHABLE MOMENTS"

Many of us have been in the car with our children rocking out to the latest "jam" when you suddenly hear words or lyrics that refer to something sexual, or even offensive.

"Hey, did he just say 'XXX?' I'm curious if you know what that means."

Another approach is to begin by reminding your child of some event, movie, or television show that touches on the topic or issue you want to discuss.



"Amsi, remember that show we saw on TV where that boy was wondering why it seemed like he was growing more slowly than all of his friends? I've been thinking about that, and I'd like to talk with you about it."



ASK FOR AN OPINION OR ADVICE

"I have a friend who's upset because she heard her daughter saying that she wanted to hang out with an older girl she likes. She asked me for advice, and I wanted to find out what you think I should tell her."

TAKE A DIRECT APPROACH

"E, there is something I want to talk with you about that has been on my mind a lot these days. Is this a good time?"

If your child says that it's not a good time, respect their boundaries and ask for another time that would be better.



IT'S OK TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT MAY FEEL AWKWARD AT FIRST

"I know this may be uncomfortable to talk to me about this subject, but I love you and it's important to me that you have information to make decisions for yourself."

KNOW YOUR RESOURCES

Provide educational materials that you have previewed. Try setting out books that are informative and age-appropriate, and attempt to re-initiate conversation from time to time if kids initially refuse to talk.

TRY A "REDO"

It's ok to revisit a conversation if you want to add more information or change what you offered at first.

"You know, I was thinking about our conversation last night and I'd like to change what I said about..."

HAVE FUN!

It's ok to be silly around these topics, as long as your child doesn't feel like you're making fun of them.

Answering Difficult Questions

ONCE YOUR CHILD BEGINS TO FEEL SAFE DISCUSSING THESE TOPICS WITH YOU, ALL SORTS OF THINGS MIGHT COME UP THAT WILL CHALLENGE YOU. THIS TOOL IS A GUIDE FOR RESPONDING TO YOUNG PEOPLES' QUESTIONS.

When responding to difficult questions, remember to **BRACE** yourself!

BREATHE * REPEAT * AFFIRM * CLARIFY * EXPLAIN/ENCOURAGE/EMPOWER

B Take a deep **Breath** and do what you need to do to be present so you can listen fully and answer or react calmly and thoughtfully.

R **Repeat** the question back to your child to make sure you are hearing them correctly. This is an opportunity to clarify what they want to know, identify the motivation behind the question, and ensure that you aren't misunderstanding them. Make sure to listen fully to what your child is saying here before responding. You will learn a lot about your child's knowledge level and beliefs if you can let them speak first.

A **Affirm** your child for asking the question and remind them of your unconditional love and support. Then take a moment (or more) to think.

"I'm so glad you asked me that question."

"You know I will always love you no matter what, even if you tell me something you think I might not want to hear."

"Hmmm... that's an interesting question. Let me think about that for a second."

"Huh- you know, I'm not really sure how to answer that question, but I'm glad you asked! I need to (talk to someone else, do some research) and get back to you. Can I tell you tomorrow?"

C **Clarify** what your child already knows and believes about the topic. Ask questions to understand what type of answer your child is looking for.

"So, what do you think the answer is?"

"What do you know about (this topic) already?"

"What do you think (the person being referred to) should do?"

"Why?" "I'm just wondering, what brought up this question for you?"

Then pause for at least 10 seconds before responding, even if it feels like forever!

E **Explain** the facts, dispel myths or misinformation, and answer the question. If relevant, describe a range of beliefs, and state your own if you think it will help. You may want to ask what your child thinks first before stating your belief.

Empower your child to come up with their own answers/resources.

"Do you want me to show you some websites/books that might be helpful for this topic?" "Who else can we ask about this topic? Where else can you go to get information?" "What have you already thought about for dealing with this situation?"

Putting New Tools into Action

LIST ONE OR TWO QUESTIONS THAT YOU DREAD BEING ASKED OR THAT YOU ARE NOT SURE HOW TO ANSWER. THEN, GO THROUGH THEM AND TAKE NOTES FOR EACH STEP AS YOU FORMULATE YOUR RESPONSE.

QUESTION 1:

QUESTION 2:

BREATHE

RESPOND

AFFIRM

CLARIFY

EXPLAIN/EMPOWER

Action Steps

What do you want your child to know about gender, puberty, sexuality, and healthy relationships?

List three messages or ideas that you want to discuss with your young person:

What are the topics you would like to talk about with your child in the next month?

What questions or concerns do you have for the school/teachers/principal? How and when will you follow up?