

Difficult Conversation Prep

Choose one topic and a moment when you can pay attention. Think about what you want to understand and where your child may feel comfortable. They can talk, write, draw, use a communication aid, or ask for a break. Keep a few notes nearby only if they help you listen.

Begin with a brief description of something you noticed, then ask how it has been for them. Or try: “Is there something you’d like me to understand?” If they want to talk, follow with one or two questions, such as “What would you like me to know?” or “What would help from me?”

Leave room for silence. You don't need to finish every question or settle everything today. If there is a safety concern, don't postpone getting help to finish the conversation.

Be clear about what you can honestly promise. You might say: “I’ll take you seriously. If I need help to keep you safe, I’ll explain what I’m doing as soon as I safely can.” Do not promise total secrecy or an outcome you cannot control.

If your child tells you they have been harmed, protection takes priority.

Listen without pressing for details. Reassure them that telling you was the right thing to do and that abuse is not their fault. Don't confront the person they name. Promptly contact a child-protection service in the place where your child is. If there is immediate danger, call the emergency services there. Explain the next steps in words your child can understand.

Identify whom you can contact for support and how you will return to the conversation if needed. The QR code opens a reusable preparation sheet if a written reminder would help.

Keep any notes private. The purpose is to understand and support your child, not collect answers for an interrogation.

The conversation can use speech, sign, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), drawing, writing, an accessible interpreter, or another trusted format. Allow breaks and extra time. Do not assume eye contact, fluent speech, a standard puberty path, two parents, or biological kinship. If the young person depends on the adult or institution involved in a concern, help them reach someone outside that relationship.

Chapter 29 covers decisions under peer pressure. Chapter 31 develops autonomous choices and confidential help. Here, success means that the young person knows the door remains open and that safety will bring calm, honest action.

Worksheet address: parentingstagebystage.com/resources/difficult-conversation-prep/