

Having Difficult Conversations with Your Teen

Scriptures

Matthew 7.12

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.

Colossians 3.12-17

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another...And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

James 1.19

...Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

1 Corinthians 13 (all of it...do this...like if you can do this you're golden....so try this)

Before | Love Always Protects

Consider Your Timing – Find low anxiety times to talk, maybe communicate in advance that you want to talk.

Consider the Setting – Sensitive conversations should probably be done in private or at least not in a public setting. Some conversations are actually best had when you're doing chores or shooting hoops rather than at the dinner table.

Consider Your Position – Do you know what you think about a topic/issue? Have you been strongly for or against a certain position? Your teen probably knows that and may find it difficult to engage with you about it.

Consider Your Patterns – Have you typically blown up at your teen during conversations like this? Are there communication patterns (strong language, aggressive, passive-aggressive, overly detached, etc.) that disrupt your conversations? Pray and prepare to engage in a godly way with your teen. If you aren't sure about your patterns, ask your spouse/close friends. Ask your teen how they feel like you typically respond.

Consider Your Teen – How do your teens typically respond to difficult conversations? Fear, anger, shame, manipulation, deceit, shutting down, yelling? Pray and prepare to avoid triggers that disrupt important conversations.

During | Love is patient, love is kind...but rejoices with the truth

How to Start

Open-ended Questions usually allow for the greatest engagement

- What do you think about...? (maybe start with a scripture, a statement, a statistic, a story)
- How do you feel about...? (see above, this is good to ask about social media posts you've seen)
- I heard this from someone...why do you think that happened?
- What made you decide to...? What do you think about that decision?
- What do you think the consequences should be?
- When we talked last time, I blew it, can you forgive me? Can we try a do-over?

When You're Actually Talking

Don't

- Dismiss their thoughts/feelings/opinions (1 Cor 13.4)
- Belittle their opinions (1 Cor 13.5)
- Misrepresent what they say (1 Cor 13.6)
- Erupt with anger or annoyance (Proverbs 12.16)
- Interrupt them (Jam 1.19)
- Make assumptions about why they say something/"mind-reading" (1 Cor 8:1a-2)
- Repay "evil" with evil (Rom 12.21)

Do

- Listen patiently and attentively (Jam 1.19)
- Try to restate their opinion to them and ask, “Is that right, did I miss anything?” (Phil 2.4-5)
- Thank them for being honest (1 Cor 13.6)
- Validate feelings, not necessarily beliefs/positions, but feelings (Heb 4.15)
- Focus on the heart and why first – always to connect us to Jesus (Col 3.16-23)
- Share vulnerably about yourself and your opinions, and especially your fears (2 Cor 12.10)
- Always use the Greatest-Commandments Lens (Matt 22.36-40)
- Admit what you don’t know (1 Cor 13.12)
- Lovingly and confidently explain why you believe what you believe (1 Pet 3.15)
- Demonstrate how you have built your house on “the rock” with scripture (Matt 7.24-27)

After | Love always hopes, always perseveres

Pray

Follow-Up

- Ask - how are you feeling about what we talked about?
- Think about what they said, and let them know what has been sticking with you.

Prepare to Revisit these topics

Appendix

Exercise on Processing Difficult Emotions

Below are adapted questions from John and Karen Louis’ “Good Enough Parenting” book. These are personal reflection questions meant to help you consider how you process difficult emotions and how you can respond to your children’s difficult emotions.

1. Think of some of the common types of emotions—joy, excitement, happiness, contentment, longing, anger, loneliness, embarrassment, fear, shame, sadness; feelings of betrayal, helplessness, depression; feeling unwanted or rejected. When you see any of these in your children, which ones do you find make you feel uncomfortable?
2. What about these feelings makes you uncomfortable?
3. Which of the three broad coping styles (surrender, avoidance and overcompensation) are triggered when you see these emotions in your children?
4. How does your coping style manifest when you see these feelings in your children? For example, do you blame yourself, avoid talking and leave, or get short-tempered with your children, or perhaps you may let your spouse deal with these uncomfortable emotions, or think it is your fault, retreat by yourself and get depressed?
5. Do you behave in a similar way each time your child experiences these feelings?
6. Can you remember specific incidents involving these feelings from your childhood? (Maybe you experienced these emotions or someone around you did.)
7. Did your parents welcome these feelings?
8. In general, how did your parents deal with your emotions?
9. When your parents dealt with you this way, how did that make you feel?
10. Is there anything you wish that they had said or done instead?
12. In the end, how did you cope with these feelings when you were a child? What do you remember doing specifically?
13. Is this similar or different to how you deal with your child when he experiences the same feelings?
14. What do you think your child wishes you would do or say instead?
15. If you were to do that, how would you be feeling now?
16. Do you see that not talking about feelings with your child can be harmful to your child?