

family  
ministry



parenting  
pathway

love God, serve others luke 10:27



PLANNING FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS



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## PLANNING FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS

In the life cycle of parenting,  
it is inevitable that tough questions and situations will come along.

How well you handle them will drive long-term behavior in your home. **The better prepared you are, the better your response will be** and the more willing your children will be to bring their questions, concerns, and problems to you. **The best time to tackle difficult subjects is when life presents them to you**—as parents, you need to capitalize on these teachable moments. Consider these tips a road map for navigating tough conversations.



### PREPARE FOR CONSISTENCY

- 1**
  - **Agree on the language you will use in your family.** Use anatomically correct names for body parts from the beginning.
  - **Plan to answer the S-E-X question honestly,** with a focus on age-appropriate information.
  - **Lessons about death and illness can be hard to explain. Build an understanding of God's greater plan** early by weaving Scripture into everyday life, including Jeremiah 29:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Proverbs 3:5–6, and Psalm 139:14.
  - **Establish your family's values early,** and then make sure you are serving as the role model of those values.
  - **Model good self-care habits,** set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and practice good stress-relieving behaviors. All of these help children feel more secure and comfortable with the unpredictable.
  - **Establish a safe word or communication pattern** that allows your teen an easy way out of peer pressure situations.
  - **Trust your gut instinct.** If you feel your teen is in a situation he or she cannot handle, don't wait to act. Children ultimately want safe boundaries and engaged parents.



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### BUILD TRUST EARLY

- 2**
- **Be the first to bring up a difficult topic.** When parents tackle tough subjects, they are modeling for their children that they are available and supportive.
  - **Realize that there is no way to shield your children from all “bad things,”** but know that discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help children feel safe and secure.
  - **Be confident.** Children take their cues from their parents. If you feel uncomfortable discussing a topic and choose to avoid or dismiss it, your children will feel embarrassed to ask you for information.
  - **Foster a sense of comfort.** If parents are able to speak without embarrassment when discussing sex, more challenging topics like abstinence, birth control, pornography, relationships, sexuality, and STDs will come more naturally.
  - **Let your children know you do not know all the answers to life’s questions,** but understand that talking about issues such as death and loss allows them to know there is no right or wrong way to feel.



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1

PREPARE FOR CONSISTENCY

2

BUILD TRUST EARLY

3

ASSEMBLE A LIKE-MINDED COMMUNITY

4

PRACTICE YOUR INITIAL RESPONSE

5

FOCUS ON THE ISSUES

6

CONCLUDE WITH THE FUTURE IN MIND

### ASSEMBLE A LIKE-MINDED COMMUNITY

3

- **Expand the circle of positive influence around your children** by inviting grandparents, aunts, uncles, and trusted friends to engage your children in conversations that might be hard to have with parents.
- **Encourage your children to seek mentors in their walk with Christ**, such as small-group leaders, older teens, or pastors.
- **Be together.** Physical comfort and connection can go a long way in troubling situations. Snuggle up, give a hug, watch something cheery, or do something fun together to reestablish connectivity.
- **Establish a network of friends to monitor social media.** It is too hard to keep up with every application and new trend, but by dividing platforms among a group, people can help monitor activities.



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- 2 BUILD TRUST EARLY
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- 5 FOCUS ON THE ISSUES
- 6 CONCLUDE WITH THE FUTURE IN MIND

### PRACTICE YOUR INITIAL RESPONSE

- 4
  - **Study your children to determine when and where to have tough conversations.** Is it best to talk after dinner, before bed, in the car to and from school or sports, at a restaurant, or while walking the dog around the block? Practice opening conversations to find when your children are most willing to share.
  - **Take some time to think before you speak.** Allow yourself the opportunity to discuss issues—especially behavior issues—later, such as after dinner or after a good night's sleep.
  - **Try not to minimize or diminish your children's concerns and fears,** but reassure them by listening and seeking to understand their true issues.



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### FOCUS ON THE ISSUES

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- **Pray before diving in.** A short prayer asking God to provide you with understanding, patience, and words to glorify Him will start any conversation from a solid platform.
- **Listen, listen, listen . . . and listen some more.** It is important to find out what your children know before you respond.
- When talking about behavior-related issues, **remind your children that it is their behavior you are discussing, not their character.**
- **Approach each situation with truth and honesty,** openly sharing your story in an age-appropriate way. Your children will appreciate your authenticity and will be more willing to expose their vulnerability if they feel they are not alone.



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### CONCLUDE WITH THE FUTURE IN MIND

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- **Help your children see the good that can come from bad situations.** Children and teens may be able to better cope with trauma or disaster by seeing how they can help others through it.
- **Reassure your children** that you will do everything you know how to do to keep them safe, encourage them, and support them as they follow Christ in their lives.
- **Do not be afraid to seek professional help** when your children show signs of persistent destructive behaviors, anxiety, or inability to move forward.



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*remember:*  
**WORDS MATTER**

**THUMBS UP**



- Begin with specific, positive compliments about your children
- Speak to their behavior, not their character
- Affirm your love and God's love for your children
- Use the term "we" instead of "you" whenever possible

- Using sarcasm or belittling your children or their feelings
- Using absolutes such as "always" or "never"



**THUMBS DOWN**