

How to Talk About Hard Topics

Anyone who has been around children for any length of time knows that you never know what they might say or ask. They say some extremely funny things, but they also ask serious questions about hard topics. When they say something funny, you know what to do – either laugh or try to hide it. But when they ask those hard questions, what do you do? Do you know what to say? If not, don't worry. You are definitely not alone.

Your words are powerful. The way you respond to your child and their questions has an effect on how they grow in their faith. But don't let that scare you, because there is Someone who can help. Rely on the Holy Spirit as your guide. You can trust God with your child and with their questions. The goal is not for you to provide all the answers. The goal is not even for you and your child to find all the answers. The goals are for your child to know Jesus better and to learn they can trust God with their questions – both big and small.

We cannot give you words for what to say in every situation. Each topic is different and each child is different. But we have created a framework that can help you no matter the topic at hand. These are some practical ways you can engage in a conversation: **Acknowledge** the child, **Allow** exploration, **Admit** we need God's help, **Affirm** a truth about God or people, and **Avoid** common pitfalls.

ACKNOWLEDGE your child's questions or concerns.

- Validate their comments or questions.
- Normalize asking questions.
- Acknowledge their thinking.

Say things like:

- *"I'm glad you asked that question. We all have questions. Let's talk about this."*
- *"I'm impressed by the way you think about this."*

ALLOW your child to explore the topic.

- Clarify or define words or context.
- Discover how the topic makes your child feel about themselves, people, or God.
- Open up respectful discussion of viewpoints.

Say things like:

- *"Do you know what this word means?"*

- *"How does this make you feel about God?"*
- *"What do you believe about this topic? How do your beliefs affect you?"*

ADMIT we all need God's help.

- Admit you and your child must humbly depend on God together for answers and understanding.
- Acknowledge you are still learning.

Say things like:

- *"It is hard to understand how things like this happen. We both need God's help to see clearly."*
- *"It feels uncomfortable when people believe different things."*

AFFIRM a truth about God and/or people.

- Give your child a biblical truth to hold onto as they wrestle with the topic.
- Connect the discussion to one of God's attributes.

Say things like:

- *"God's image in us gives every person worth and purpose. How does that truth encourage you?"*
- *"God is incomprehensible, but He loves it when people seek Him! What do you think about asking God to help you understand Him better?"*

AVOID common pitfalls.

- Prevent the possibility of your child feeling shame for asking a question.
- Do not respond from shock.
- Avoid potentially shutting your child down from asking future questions.
- Do not make assumptions about what they know or believe.
- Do not try to force them to believe something.
- Based on your child's age and stage of development, do not give more information than they need or than they ask for.

Do not say things like:

- *"That is not an appropriate question."*
- *"You are too young for this topic."*
- *"How could you doubt that about God?"*
- *"In our family, this is what you must believe."*