

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO KNOW FIRST

Children are far more perceptive than most adults realize. They sense tension, hear conversations, and notice changes in the home — even when parents try to shield them. **Silence does not protect children. Honest, calm, age-appropriate conversation does.** You do not have to have all the answers. You just have to be willing to sit with them in the question.

■ Research consistently shows that children who have open, honest conversations with a trusted adult about hard topics show greater emotional resilience, stronger trust, and healthier coping skills than those who are shielded from difficult realities.

TIPS FOR 6 COMMON HARD TOPICS

Hard Topic	What To Say / Do	What To Avoid
Death / Grief	Use the real words — 'died,' not 'went to sleep.' Explain simply: their body stopped working. Let them cry. Share your own grief — it shows them feelings are safe.	Avoid 'They're in a better place' as a first response. Give space for the emotion before the explanation.
Divorce / Separation	Tell them together if possible. Be clear it is not their fault — say this more than once. Keep their routine as stable as possible. Let them love both parents freely.	Never speak negatively about the other parent. Do not make children messengers or ask them to choose sides.
Incarceration of a Parent / Loved One	Use honest, simple language: 'They made a choice that broke the law and now they have to stay somewhere else for a while.' Reassure them of the love that remains.	Avoid shame-based language. Do not hide it — children often find out from others and feel more betrayed by the secret than the truth.
Mental Health / Addiction	Name what they are seeing: 'Mom has an illness that affects how she thinks and acts. It is not your fault and it is not something you caused.' Seek support as a family.	Do not normalize it silently or pretend it isn't happening. Children living with it deserve language and context.
Financial Hardship	Use age-appropriate honesty: 'We are in a tight season right now and we are making some changes.' Emphasize the family's resilience — not the fear.	Avoid catastrophizing or putting the emotional weight on the child. They should know something is different — not feel responsible for fixing it.
Violence / Community Trauma	Limit news exposure. Let them ask questions and follow their lead. Be honest that some things are scary — and that you will keep them as safe as you can.	Do not promise things you cannot guarantee. Avoid detailed descriptions of violent events to young children.

ALWAYS DO THIS — NEVER DO THIS

Always

- ✓ Use honest, age-appropriate language. Children handle truth better than silence.
- ✓ Let them lead with questions. Answer only what they ask — then pause.
- ✓ Validate their feelings before explaining anything. 'It makes sense that you feel scared.'
- ✓ Reassure them of what is NOT changing — your love, your home, their safety.
- ✓ Revisit the conversation. One talk is rarely enough. Let it be ongoing.
- ✓ Tell them it is okay to feel sad, confused, or angry about hard things.
- ✓ Point them to God as a source of comfort, not just an answer to memorize.

Never

- ✗ Say 'You'll understand when you're older' — this shuts down trust.
- ✗ Lie or give false hope. Children sense dishonesty and it damages trust deeply.
- ✗ Use children as messengers or allies between two adults in conflict.
- ✗ Have the conversation when you are emotionally flooded. Wait until you are calm.
- ✗ Overwhelm them with adult details they do not need to carry.
- ✗ Promise things you cannot control — 'Everything will be fine.'
- ✗ Leave the conversation open-ended with no comfort or next step.

A CONVERSATION I NEED TO HAVE — FILL THIS IN

A Conversation I Need to Have

The topic I need to address with my child:

My child's age and what they already know:

How I will start the conversation:

Support I May Need

Someone I can talk to before having this conversation:

A resource or book I will look into:

How I will check back in with my child afterward:

■ KFM FAMILY FIRST PROGRAMS — Emergency Assistance for Families in Need

Kingdom Family Ministry's **Family First Programs** provide emergency assistance to families in need. Our goal is to strengthen families with meaningful, responsible support. Assistance is available once per service category within a 12-month period, based on funding availability.

Serving Montgomery County and North Harris County area families.

Learn more and apply:

www.kingdomfamilyministry.org/gethelp

✉ support@kingdomfamilyministry.org

☎ 936-280-0822

If your family is going through a hard season, you do not have to face it alone. Reach out.

RESOURCES

American Psychological Association — Talking to Children

apa.org — Research-based guides for talking to children about grief, divorce, trauma, and other difficult topics.

Zero to Three

zerotothree.org — Resources for parents of young children navigating hard conversations and emotional development.

Child Mind Institute

childmind.org — Practical guides on talking to kids about anxiety, trauma, mental health, and family changes.

KidsHealth — For Parents

kidshealth.org — Plain-language articles on how to explain hard topics to children at every age.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

nami.org | 1-800-950-6264 — Resources for families navigating a loved one's mental illness, including how to talk to children.

◆ FAITH & ENCOURAGEMENT

"He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield." — Psalm 91:4 (NIV)

You cannot protect your children from every hard thing in the world — but you can be the safe place they come back to. When you sit with them in the hard conversation instead of avoiding it, you become their refuge. That is one of the greatest gifts a parent can give.

My Prayer / Reflection

My Action Step This Week
