

## Discussing Stressful Events

Here are the steps for discussing difficult topics:

1. **Have a plan.** Prepare what you want to say beforehand. Decide what details you think are important to share and what, if any, may not be helpful to share.
2. **Stay calm.** It is okay, and even helpful, to show your emotions, but it is important to stay calm and manage those emotions. This shows your children that it is okay to be upset, but that these feelings are manageable.
3. **Initiating conversations and following your child's lead.** Start conversations by sharing what you have been thinking about, or what other kids may be thinking about. Find out what your child already knows and what they want to know more about. This helps you give them the information they need and to correct misinformation or misunderstandings they have.
4. **Be honest and clear.** Describe things in a simple and straightforward way. Tell your child the truth about what is happening. Saying things that are not exactly true or presenting information in an unrealistically positive light runs the risk of confusing your child or lowering her trust in you if she hears conflicting information later.
5. **Admit when you don't know.** It is okay for you not to have all the answers. If you truthfully don't know the answer to something, it is okay to say "I don't know." You can tell your child that you will try to find more information to answer their questions. Alternatively, it may be appropriate to tell them that nobody knows the answers they are looking for right now.
6. **Listen actively and accept how your child reacts.** Children respond to stressful events, news, and change in many different ways. These can include crying, being angry, arguing with the person delivering the news, asking lots of questions, or seeming to have no reaction at all. All of these are normal and can change over time. It is most important for you as a parent to stay calm, express interest, and reflect back what you hear your child say. For example, "I hear that you are angry, I feel that way too." Realize that our children may start by only sharing a small part of what is bothering them at first.
7. **Don't blame.** Don't blame what is happening on another person or group of people. Blaming others does not help children cope with the situation and can lead to confusion (for example, if divorcing parents each blame the other). Also, kids may tune out if parents appear angry, defensive or judgmental.
8. **Empower your child.** All of us, including children, can feel helpless when faced with distressing news and challenging situations. Offer reassurance that it is your job as the parent to handle the situation and that you will care for them during this time. Give your child some age-appropriate jobs or responsibilities that allow her to feel confident and channel her concern into action.
9. **Be available to check back in.** Discussing distressing news is often a process that unfolds over time. Make a plan with your child to check in again later, and notice times when your child is most likely to talk. Remember to talk about what your child can do if they have more questions. Explain that some people (kids at school, siblings) might say things that aren't true and encourage your child to talk with you about other information they receive.

**Discussing Stressful Events  
Work Sheet**

<b>Difficult Discussion Plan</b>	
<b>Topic:</b>	
<b>Pre-Discussion Planning</b>	
<b>Things to include</b>	<b>Things to avoid</b>
<b>Post-Discussion Planning</b>	
<b>Questions to Follow Up On</b>	<b>What we can do to help</b>