

Having Supportive Conversations

Having supportive conversations about sensitive topics with children and young people can be difficult, but it is so important! A key part of a child's emotional development is being able to understand and express how they feel. This way they can learn to process, cope, and manage other difficult feelings and situations as they grow.

Every child is different. Their ability to process information will depend on age, ability, and resilience.

Remember – you will know them best.

This toolkit is designed to help you make the right decisions on when and how to have a supportive conversation.

WHAT to say

- 🗣️ Decide what you want to share.
- 🗣️ Consider what they might already know.
- 🗣️ Stick to simple, honest facts.
- 🗣️ Be prepared to discuss difficult questions or feelings.

HOW to say it

- 🗣️ Tailor your approach to your child or young person's age and capacity.
- 🗣️ Use clear, simple language and avoid alarming terms.
- 🗣️ Actively listen and be honest in your responses.
- 🗣️ Ask neutral, open questions.
- 🗣️ Stay calm, reassuring, and interested in the conversation.

WHEN to say it

- 🗣️ Timing is everything.
- 🗣️ Choose a nurturing environment if possible.
- 🗣️ Make sure that needs are met (not tired, hungry, cold, upset, or distracted).
- 🗣️ Watch for visual cues that your child or young person is looking to talk to you.
- 🗣️ Create moments for undistracted conversation.

There's a lot going on in the world right now. What do you know about it?

You can always come to me, no matter how small the worry or issue is.

Thank you for being so honest with me. I really appreciate it.

Thank you for coming to talk to me. I care about you so much, and I want to listen and help where I can.

There are no silly questions. You can ask me anything, and I will do my best to answer you. If I don't know the answer, I'd love to figure it out together.

You are loved. What you think and say truly matters to me.



What to say?

When considering global issues, it's important to **decide what you want to share**. This can be tricky to determine with the sheer volume of news sources and outlets available on phones, tablets, and televisions.

Consider what they might already know. Your child or young person may have already formed thoughts or opinions on what is happening. **Stick to simple, honest facts** about a situation to make any responses or questions easier – you don't need to know all the answers! You should also **be prepared to discuss difficult questions or feelings** with those in your care. This is a natural and appropriate response to sensitive topics.

How to say it?

Tailor your approach to your child or young person's age and capacity. Some will be more equipped than others to have mature conversations.

Use **clear, simple language** to avoid overwhelming or confusing them and if possible, **avoid alarming terms** (i.e. 'nuclear threat' or 'mass murder'). If they have questions or concerns, make sure to **actively listen and be honest in your responses**. Seek answers with them if needed.

Meet them where they are at by **asking neutral, open questions** using a calm tone of voice. Your reaction to their reaction is important. **Stay calm, reassuring, and interested in the conversation.**

They will be looking to you for guidance, so speaking clearly and without excessive emotion will help them feel safe and heard.

By modelling the behaviour and responses expected of your child or young person, it will help them learn how to manage their own reactions and responses in the future.

Remember:

This type of conversation should not be a one-off, but rather a line of discussion that grows with them.

When to say it?

Timing is everything. The best place to start a conversation around sensitive topics is **in a nurturing environment** free of interruption.

Make sure needs are met by ensuring your child or young person is not tired, hungry, cold, upset, or distracted when you try to begin a conversation. However, your child may approach you first.

Watch for visual cues that your child or young person is looking to talk to you (i.e. lingering in the kitchen while you prepare dinner). They may choose a time when *you* are busy to distract from any nerves or worries they are carrying.

If necessary, **create moments for undistracted conversation** by setting aside your task to listen to them. If you are unable to do this, ask if you can set a specific time to talk with them before the end of the day.

Remind them that you care about their thoughts and want to devote your complete attention to what is on their mind.

