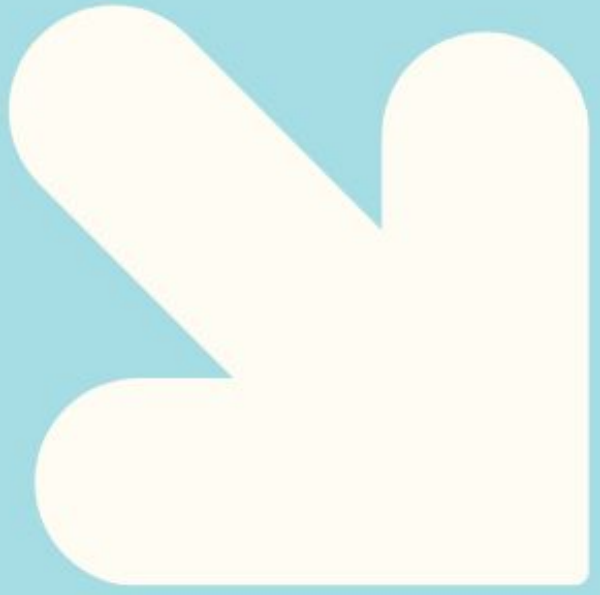




How to Have Difficult Conversations With Our Children

BUILDING CONNECTION,
COURAGE &
AUTHENTICITY

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YOU'RE PROBABLY
WONDERING...

Who Am I?



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Why These Conversations Matter



Kids notice difference, fairness, justice, safety, bodies, gender, race — long before we think they do.



When we don't talk about big topics, kids create their own mental models using limited information from peers/media.



Our job is to keep communication open and build felt safety so kids bring their questions to us.



The Parent Nervous System = The Curriculum

- Before we talk, we regulate.
- Our tone, posture, breath, pace communicate more than words.
- “If I’m grounded, my child feels grounded enough to explore.”
- Use curiosity, warmth, and humanity — not lectures or pressure.



What Are Mental Models?

Mental models = the automatic stories our brain uses to make sense of the world.

Examples parents carry:

- “A good parent always has the right answers.”
- “A good kid listens the first time.”
- “Talking about hard things will scare my child.”

Mental models come from:

- Our childhood
- Culture, religion, community
- Stress & trauma
- Generational beliefs
- What society says “good parents” do

Mental models are not moral. They're data — not destiny.



UPDATING MENTAL MODELS (FOR PARENTS!)



To have brave conversations, parents often have to:

- Notice old mental models
- Hold them with compassion
- Update them to fit our values today

Updated mental models may look like:

- “Curiosity matters more than having all the answers.”
- “Hard topics are grounding, not scary.”
- “My goal isn’t perfect parenting — it’s relational safety.”



Parent Scripts for Updating Mental Models

Use these when you feel unsure, rushed, or reactive:

- “I’m noticing part of me wants to rush to an answer... let me slow down.”
- “I’m learning right alongside you.”
- “It’s okay not to know everything. We can figure it out together.”
- “Wow, that’s a meaningful question. I’m glad you brought it to me.”
- “I want to be the kind of grown-up who listens, even when it’s uncomfortable.”

These scripts model flexibility and emotional courage.



Implicit Bias: What It Means for Parents

- Everyone has implicit biases — shaped by mental models + experience.
- Bias is not a character flaw; it's a brain shortcut.
- These conversations are a natural moment to explore our own beliefs.
- Kids benefit when we show that learning never stops.

Awareness + repair > perfection



IT'S OKAY TO BE UNCOMFORTABLE

**Kids don't need perfect answers.
They need present, regulated
adults.**

Scripts for discomfort:

- “This is complicated.”
- “I feel a little uncomfortable, and that’s okay.”
- “Let’s take our time with this.”
- “You can always come back with more questions.”

Discomfort = growth.
Avoidance = silence.
Silence creates confusing mental models



Why Ongoing Conversations Matter

- Kids learn in spirals — each year brings more nuance.
- Big topics aren't one-and-done.
- We want the communication door wide open.

Script:

“You can ask me this again anytime. Your questions are always welcome.”



CONVERSATION STARTERS

Use open, curious questions:

- “What have you heard about _____?”
- “What made you wonder about that?”
- “How did that make your body feel?”
- “What part felt confusing? What felt big?”
- “What do you think is going on?”



Big Topics Kids Commonly Ask About

- Race, skin color, difference
- Gender, identity, bodies
- Disability, fairness, inclusion
- Divorce, loss, safety
- Violence in the news
- Politics (yes... even at age 5)

“What matters most is not having a perfect script — but being a safe place for big feelings.”



The Brain Needs Safety to Learn

- Connection first
- Co-regulation = emotional WiFi
- Safety creates openness, curiosity, and empathy
- Kids learn best when the grown-up is regulated



PARENT SCRIPTS TO USE ANYTIME



“Thank you for asking. I’m glad we can talk about big things.”

“Let’s slow down and figure this out together.”

“I’m right here with you.”

“You didn’t do anything wrong by asking.”

“This might feel confusing — and that totally makes sense.”

THE PARENT'S CORE JOB

- **Stay regulated**
- **Stay curious**
- **Keep the connection alive**
- **Keep the door open**
- **Repair when needed**
- **Grow alongside your child**





Closing Message

“This is hard.
You’re human.
You’re learning.
And you’ve got this.”

Kids don’t need perfect parents — they need connected, courageous ones.



THANK YOU!

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