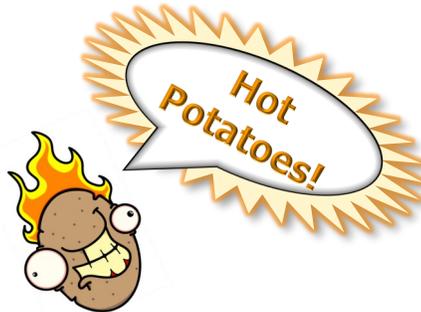


What to Say When You Don't Know What to Say



Conversations with Families about Hot Topics

How to Talk About Hard Topics

"Hot Potatoes" are about hot topics, which are by nature difficult, touchy, uncomfortable, and...often avoided because of it.

Sawtooth Mountain Clinic's physician, Dr. Sandy Stover, and Behavioral Health Consultant, Sarah Dragswick, recently spoke about ways that parents can best handle hot topics - without anyone getting burned.

As parents, sometimes we just don't know how to start talking with our children about tough subjects or what to do if things go from *hard* to *heated*. When we develop the skills to talk with them about one hot

topic, we have the skills to talk with them about the other hot topics that are going to pop up as we move through life. While every family comes up against their own challenges and has its own unique dynamics, many of the same skills can apply to different topics, different kids, and different ages.

So, where to start?

Before you take on the role of a professor giving a lecture, start out as a detective. Think about your child's characteristics: age, temperament, stress level, past experiences, etc.

Plan what you want to discuss while taking these individualities into account. Then think about your own history and characteristics and plan the details of your discussion so it can happen at a time and place when you can be at your best.

By thinking about what you want to say and how you want to say it, you'll have a game plan to follow if the going gets tough.



Ten Ways to Have a Better Conversation:

https://www.ted.com/talks/celeste_headlee_10_ways_to_have_a_better_conversation#t-696313

Seek First To Understand, Then To Be Understood

-Steven Covey

Effective Conversations

Start early.

Start talking to your kids even before they can talk. Children learn to have conversations by talking to people that are listening to them.

Listen First.

Most of the time in conversation, we're listening just enough to plan our response. Put down the phone, turn off the TV, and listen to understand.

Keep calm and carry on.

Watch your own emotions. If you feel yourself getting upset - hit the pause button. Come back to the discussion when you're feeling better.

Be Truthful.

Nobody likes to be told lies. Tell the truth in a gentle, age-appropriate way. The truth that a 5-year-old needs is very different from the truth that a 15-year-old needs.

Apologize when you're wrong.

When you own up to your mistakes, ask for forgiveness, and strive to do better, you give your children the freedom to do the same.

Stay on topic.

Hot topics often travel in packs. Stick to one at a time, and make a plan to come back later to address other concerns.

Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.

-Winston Churchill



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What impacts communication styles?

- Child's Age
- Child's Gender
- Child's Individual Characteristics (shy, outspoken....)
- Child's Birth Order
- Parent's own upbringing, age, life experiences, stress level....
- Community and cultural norms and biases

When Things Get Too Hot To Handle:

Sometimes, when a topic is difficult, tempers can flare. How can we keep a difficult conversation from spiraling into a fight?

1. Listening is the biggest gift we can give when the going gets rough. It says, "You are important to me."
2. "Time out" is for kids *and* parents. Take some time to cool down and refocus on the topic at hand.
3. Practice seeing the issue from the other person's perspective. You don't have to buy it, but it can be useful to try it on.
4. Avoid assumptions, and ask for clarification. It's possible that you don't have the whole story.
5. Don't interrupt or hog the conversation. Everyone deserves the chance to speak their piece.
6. Pay attention to both the words and the feelings that are being expressed
7. Own your feelings and control your actions. Your moods shouldn't dictate your manners.
8. Stay in the here and now. Rather than blaming for past behaviors, focus on what can be done in this moment to solve the problem.

9. Conflict can be healing. When handled well, resolving conflict builds trust and security. It feels good to know your relationship is stronger than your disagreements.



Peace is not the absence of conflict,
it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.

- Ronald Reagan

Where can I get more information?

The good folks at Grand Marais Public Library can help you find any of these, and more!

Books for parents to read

The Five Love Languages of Children
by Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk
by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish

Queen Bees & Wannabes
by Rosalind Wiseman

The Bully, the Bullies, and the Bystander
by Barbara Coloroso

Getting To Calm
by Laura S. Kastner, PhD, Jennifer Wyatt. ParentMap Magazine, 2009

Raising Boys, Third Edition: Why Boys Are Different--and How to Help Them Become Happy and Well-Balanced Men,
by Steve Biddulph

Books to read to/with kids or for kids to read themselves

I Miss You: A First Look at Death
by Pat Thomas (for younger kids)

The Grieving Teen: A Guide for Teenagers and Their Friends
by Helen Fitzgerald

It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health by Robie H. Harris

Llama Llama and the Bully Goat
by Anna Dewdney

I Funny: A Middle School Story
by James Patterson and Chris Grabenstein

Moving Day
by Ralph Fletcher (for slightly older kids)

On the web:

<http://www.stopbullying.gov/what-is-bullying/>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/>

<http://stayteen.org/>

<http://commonsensemedia.org>

http://www.ted.com/playlists/150/advice_to_help_you_be_a_great

<http://www.npr.org/programs/ted-radio-hour/483080945/nudge>

