



HOPE Newsletter - Issue 69

Use Crisis to Connect More Deeply with Your Child

"The key to communication is not what we say, but rather the attitude that lies behind what we say... all of us are telepathically communicating all the time. Every moment, we are choosing to join or to separate, and the person to whom we're speaking feels what we have chosen regardless of our words."

-Marianne Williamson

Life is full of tough conversations with our kids, whether that's explaining to your four year old why Grandma died, hearing from your eight year old that he was bullied on the playground, or having your twelve year old fall apart the night before his big speech.

You may know that the Chinese character for the word crisis is actually a combination of two characters: one means "danger;" the other means "opportunity." Our goal, of course, is to have open lines of communication, which is what keeps crises from developing. But into every home a crisis or two must fall, and every crisis with your child is also an opportunity.

You get a chance to connect more deeply with your child, to teach him how to problem-solve with really big problems, and to show him how to manage upsetting feelings.

How can you help your child in tough conversations?

- Listen. Don't say much, but really pay attention.
- Empathize. Feel from your child's perspective. Let her get those feelings out, no matter how upset she is.
- Hold your own awareness that it isn't the end of the world, even if it feels like it to your child, but don't try to talk your child out of her upset.
- Once your child is less emotional, help her to problem-solve.

But don't wait for crises to have the tough conversations you need to have. Think of it as home-schooling, and you're the teacher. Or therapy, and you're the therapist. All

parents feel uncomfortable talking with kids about some issues. The best parents do it anyway. You owe it to your child to summon up your courage and have those hard talks. And doing so may avoid some of the crises.

Why is it so important to teach your kids how to have tough conversations? Because close relationships depend on the ability to meet the needs of both people in the relationship, and to negotiate the inevitable bumps when those needs conflict. Successfully navigating challenging discussions will bring your family closer, minimize the bumps in your family life, and teach your child a critical life skill – one that's considerably more important than doing his own laundry.

Your child's success throughout life will depend on his ability to navigate difficult interpersonal situations – on his block, at work, in intimate relationships. Kids learn how to work things out with other people by doing it. If he learns from you that difficult discussions are to be avoided, he's more likely to get divorced someday, or fired. If, on the other hand, he learns from you that people who love each other can disagree but work things out so that both people win, he's likely to put that skill to use with his peers, in his intimate relationships, and in the rest of his life

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