



Talking about Difficult Subjects with Children

Talking about difficult subjects can be... well, difficult! News of abuse having occurred within a family, school or parish community can be upsetting to parents and children alike. As a parent or guardian, you may be wondering if you should talk to your child about what has happened and if so... how? You may be asking yourself:

“What should I say?”

“Should I wait for my child to bring it up?”

“Is it better to just let my child forget about it?”

This can be an anxious and confusing time for both you and your child and YES, you should discuss it. Hopefully, you have been working on establishing open, honest communication with your child, as having a comfortable report will make bringing up a difficult topic easier.

Here are some tips and suggestions for how to discuss this difficult and sometimes complicated topic:

Bring it up first and start with the known. It is usually best if you begin with what you know the child has seen, heard or already mentioned. “I know you saw the story about your school on television.” Or “You mentioned that the kids at school were talking about...”

Normalize Feelings and Accept Strong Emotions. A child can feel confused about the many feelings that may arise at a time like this. Letting your child know his or her feelings are normal can help the child feel more comfortable. Let the child know that what has happened is very upsetting for everybody and that it can help to talk about it. You can then ask if they would

like to discuss it or ask you questions. Listen with Acceptance and Go at the Child's Pace.

Give it Time. Some children will want to discuss what happened right away and others may need to wait a while. The child may ask one or two questions and then change the topic, only to come back to the subject days or even weeks later.

Be Honest and Keep Promises. Honesty can help repair doubts the child might be feeling about adults. For this reason, it important you do not lie or avoid questions. Answering what the child may perceive as difficult or upsetting questions clearly and matter-of-factly can help calm the child and alleviate anxiety.

Keep your Routine. Children find security in order and routine. During this period, try and keep to your regular school and weekend schedules, whenever possible.