

Tackling Tough Conversations

- **Think before you speak.** You may want to yell and scream. You may want to fume in silence, but the time to talk about what's bothering you is not when you're the most upset, but after you calm down. Yes, tell your child that you're upset when you are at the height of your emotions. Make sure your child knows that something bad happened, but also explain that you need to calm down so that you can talk about the issue with a level head.
- **Talk when both you and your child are calm.** People calm down at different rates. One person may be ready to talk but the other may not. Make sure both you and your child can speak calmly about the tough issue.
- **Listen to your child.** Too often when we're upset, we focus all of our energy on what we want to say, what we want to teach. Take time to listen to your child, really listen. People are more likely to work through tough issues when both sides feel heard and respected.
- **Discuss the issue more than once.** A tough issue cannot be resolved in one conversation. You may need to revisit the topic multiple times over multiple weeks (or months or years). Each time you talk, make sure you're discussing it from a new angle. Otherwise, your kids will think (correctly) that you're nagging. Change doesn't happen by trying to push the same agenda over and over. Change happens when both parties buy into the problem and the solution.
- **Work together on the issue.** Most parents don't have all the answers! Work with your child. If you're not making much progress, get others involved. School counselors and social workers often can provide helpful insights and solutions. Other parents may have suggestions. Ask for help. Keep asking until you get help that truly makes a difference.
- **Act Now!** Deal with tough issues as they arise, especially when they're small. Don't wait for the problem to get worse. Talk about tough topics right away so that your child knows that you care and that you don't gloss over problems. Even though your relationship may get tense in the short term, that's better than having problems grow too big to manage well.