

Having Hard Conversations

A young 16-year-old woman and her mother moved into our home due to a physical abuse situation in their family. After many weeks the daughter wandered into my office and threw herself into my lap crying. We sat together for quite a while then I said: “Would you like to talk?” She shared her fears and I mostly listened. It was the start of a friendship that has now spanned 30 years. I’m convinced an ear is often the best gift we can give to the next generation when the opportunity arises.

Molly

I was talking to my best friend about some relationship problems I was having. When I was done, the first thing she told me was: “I have some things to say but you aren’t going to like them, it’s not what you want to hear.” She was worried about upsetting me, but I told her the reason I reached out to her was because I know she will be honest with me and explain things in a way I can understand. She was right, I didn’t like some of the things she had to say. But it gave me a new perspective and is why I go to her. That honesty and the ability to talk to each other openly and without fear of being judged is the best way to have a hard conversation.

Kelsey

As a parent of four teenagers I often find myself thinking back to a time when our conversations were more simple. What I would give to go back and have a conversation about being a good friend, or the importance of honesty! Now we have ongoing conversations about social media use, digital citizenship, mental health awareness and drug and alcohol use. These are conversations that sometimes leave me drained as a parent. I am grateful for resources like www.talkheart2heart.org that remind me parenting doesn’t mean perfection. I don’t have to get the hard conversations right the first time, sometimes I just have to plant a seed and let the conversation grow with time.

Abbe

My hard conversation was talking with my teenage daughter about dating and being true to herself. After a hard breakup (her first) she struggled with feelings of depression and guilt. We talked openly and honestly about the fact that some people aren’t a good fit for each other and it doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with either person! She’s begun to understand that being yourself and respecting your boundaries is more important than conforming to something others want you to be.

Meg

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One of the best conversations I've ever had with my dad (and one I will never forget!) happened while we were out hunting. We were driving to where we would stay that night and had been sharing stories all day of past hunting times. This was shortly after my grandpa had died and before we got out, he told me: "I never got to tell my dad how much I enjoyed and appreciated hunting with him all those years. So I wanted to make sure I tell all of you how much I love sharing this time with you." I'd never thought about telling my dad how much I love that I've gotten to share this experience with him and my grandpa, but he opened the door to that conversation and I get to tell him every year now because of that one moment!

Kelsey

I have one coming up, my 12-year-old niece tried to run away. She didn't end up doing it, but she had a plan and a packed bag. I believe she was looking for attention, and I want to help explain to her there are other ways to get positive attention through sports, giving gifts (I like to give baked goods 😊) and many other ways. I'd like to try to help her find those ways.

The Cool Aunt

A hard conversation I had was with my father, discussing my older brother who is suicidal and has struggled with his mental health for over 10 years. My father couldn't understand why he won't accept help and suggestions- along with stopping therapy for not working. I took this as an opportunity to have an open honest conversation with my father about how different generations visualize mental health, as well as how suicide is portrayed in today's society. This opened a door for my father and I to role-play what he would say (and how) the next time he talks to my brother.

Sister of a Brother with a Mental Health Diagnosis

As a young 32-year-old woman, never did I think or believe I would be losing my mom to cancer. Every third night I stayed at my parents' house – supporting both my mom and dad. I woke to my dad calling for me. I frantically ran to their bedroom, only to find them crumpled on the floor in each other's arms. I gasped and asked: "What are you doing??" Dad responded: "We're dancing, what's it look like!?" He had attempted to carry my mom to the bathroom, levelheaded mom knew they were going to fall and convinced him to just go down together. Untangling them was a bit like "twister for seniors", but it was the last experience that the three of us shared together. My siblings and I still talk about our strong family bond, valuing the moments we were able to care for our parents.

Sandy

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Our college age son is worried about what he will do after he graduates in May. I got to talk to him about not expecting him to have his whole life together when his graduation date has come and gone. We got to talk about stress and pressure and how he can take his time when he gets out of school. I was so grateful for the chance to be able to reassure him about something I didn't even know he was worried about! Even moms of kids in college still have a role to play!

Teri

I met my children when they were six and eight years old and I was dating their mother. As she and I became more serious, I spent increasing amounts of time in their home, which meant the kids and I became closer. Their biological dad had not been a part of their life for some time. One lazy Sunday afternoon, I began falling asleep in the big easy chair. They both ran up to the chair and crawled in on either side of me and we dozed off together. I had been allowed into their family. Even though their mother and I eventually divorced they always kept me as their dad.

Otto

A hard but needed parenting conversation I had with my husband recently was about not seeing eye to eye on consequences. He grew up getting spanked and put in time-out every other day. I never was spanked and can't remember ever being put in time-out. I feel passionate about us using positive parenting techniques and had been actively reading up on it and trying them out. I was surprised and relieved when he recognized that I was more passionate about my parenting style than he was about his. We concluded that I should get him a "Cliff's Notes" version of what I am learning and we could talk more later.

Amber

When my twins were in fourth grade they were absolutely horrified by the idea of having to watch "the video" at school about personal care and their changing bodies. They were so freaked out about it that I caught them making a plan to get out of going to school the day it was being shown! I sat them down and asked them what they were afraid of and they told me it was just gross and they didn't want to think about it. We ended up talking about way more than what they eventually saw on the video and they calmed down enough to go to school. At the end of the day the only thing they remembered about the video was: "Body hair is so gross mom!"

Twin Mom

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The hardest conversation I've had yet was with my husband about five months after our son was born. I had been dealing with a long-term foe, depression. It had become suicidal ideation now, and I finally realized that I needed help. Talking to him was the day I started living again.

A New Mom

When my son was 17, he had his first girlfriend. He was initially excited and felt a sense of accomplishment. Our rule had always been that he couldn't date until he was able to pay for it and do his own transportation. Everything was good for the first few months and then there were tears. Lots of tears, late at night. Things were not well. He was not being treated like the young gentleman we had tried to raise. They both had some growing up to do. I knew how I would handle it. But I also know my son. He would not respond well to my way. He couldn't do my way. I had to love him through the tears and help him to see that he was worth more than the way he was being treated. His self-worth was not wrapped up in her nor in how she chose to treat him. Fast forward two years later. This young lady is in his life again and there are feelings again. Now I am in coaching mode...remember how you felt. Remember the tears. Evaluate what you want from the relationship. Does it live up to your goals? The conversation will go on, but I will continue to be his biggest fan and his best cheerleader.

Involved Dad

The last hard conversation I had with my kids was with my 9 year old son. He told me that kids at school were commenting that not being able to play videos games because they are violent doesn't make any sense because he hunts which is violent. Internally I was thinking "I am not smart enough to have this conversation, where is your father!?" I bought some time by asking him what he thought about it which opened the door to a great conversation about our family values. I enjoyed hearing him talk about treating animals with respect and how he knows too much time in front of a screen isn't healthy for his growing brain. I eventually found the words to explain the deeper philosophical issues and ask him to practice what he might say next time it comes up at school.

Mom of Three

When my first niece was born in 2000 she completely changed our family. I loved making the drive to Omaha as often as possible just to watch her breathe. As she grew it was obvious that her smile brightened everyone's world around her. My heart always ached as I hugged her and said goodbye when I had to leave but one day something changed. I remember being in the entryway of the house and when I hugged her, she hugged me back. All was right with the world in that moment.

Loving Aunt

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