

# HEALTHY DISCOURSE

Quarterly Newsletter of the APS Mental Health Committee

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## Helpful ways to have conversation with your child(ren) on challenging issues:

It is that time again when we are all gearing up to put in our vote and be a part of our great democratic process. While there is so many things to celebrate that bring us together, this time can also bring up topics that can be challenging to talk about. They can often create great divides in family and communities. A common source of stress I hear from parents, and experience myself, is knowing how to talk about challenging topics with our children. We often feel like we have to have all the answers or that we are going to say the wrong thing. Whether it's at home or in the classroom, there are few tricks I rely on when I am faced with a challenging or sensitive topic.

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**Take a breath:** It can be easy to have a quick or off the cuff response when our children say something that might catch us off guard or something we don't agree with. It is normal as their parent or caregiver to want to tell them the "right" or "wrong" thing. This gets even more challenging as our children get older and are exposed to other perspectives. A simple way to slow the conversation down and model being open to their thoughts is to take a breath. This gives us a moment to pause and allow space for curiosity. Lastly, know that conversations are not a one and done thing but a series of conversations. This means you'll have opportunity for a "do over" if it doesn't go as planned.

**Use Wonderment:** This might come easier to some than others but is a crucial tool in helping our children develop their critical thinking skills. Using open ended questions to help them think about their ideas and perspectives allows them to have a safe space to be curious and challenge their beliefs. Using wonderment and open ended questions also helps to keep conversations about information and not about individuals. This can sound like "what do you think about..." or "what would you do differently?"

**Self-regulation:** There are going to be times when we don't like or agree with what our children are saying. While we may not always walk away from a conversation agreeing, it is crucial that we model for our children how to have a discussion respectfully. It is equally important to have a clear message of love and understanding. When challenging conversations arise having clear rules of engagement can be helpful. It might be time to talk openly as a family about these rules and norms so everyone is clear ahead of time. This can help model healthy norms of engagement that will lead to healthier relationships in the future. It is also normal to sometimes need to have a break in conversation.

- written by: Andrew Jakobcic, APS Behavioral Coach



## Parent Resources

<https://www.apa.org/topics/talking-children>

Gurwitch, Robin Ph.D. ***How to Talk to Children about Difficult News***, American Psychological Association. November 2015.

<https://thrive.psu.edu/blog/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-tough-topics>

Thrive Blog: ***How to Talk to Kids about Tough Topics***. Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness. June 21, 2018.



### CRISIS HOTLINES

**CMH- OTTAWA CO. 24 HOUR HELPLINE**

1-866-512-4357

**NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE**

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

**"BE KIND TO YOUR MIND" HOTLINE**

1-888-535-6136

(24 Hour Hotline for MI residents seeking help around depression, anxiety, anger or loss)