



Consider child's age when tackling difficult questions

June 14, 2010

Evansville Courier and Press

Nothing brings fear to the mind of parents more than the thought that their child wants to know about difficult topics such as substance abuse or mental illness in the family or sex! This topic often makes otherwise competent parents into babbling idiots. We try to say anything to distract the little darling from their query. Offer them a cookie, play a board game (maybe for the first time in months), turn on television and watch cartoons with them.

Desperation turns to near panic when our children show the same determination we enjoyed when they were trying to learn to walk, and ask the question again. As my son is often quoted as saying when he was two years old, and his mother and I were looking to have a private conversation, "There is no escaping me." There is no escaping that children have an endless curiosity about the world and how it works.

The simple answer to how to talk to your children about difficult topics is to answer their questions when they have them. While this sounds easy it is important to keep in mind some factors when formulating your answer.

The first is exactly what is the child asking. In this example, let's discuss the difficult task of talking about sex with your young child. Frequently they may ask "Where did I come from?" You may get a very strange look if you tell them about the in utero development of the fetus. Then when you ask if you answer their question well enough for them, they explain, "Yes, but did I come from Evansville like you or Chicago like mom?"

The second is the age of the child asking the question. Young child often get confused about how many organs are working inside the body. So the question,

"Did I come from your stomach?" demands different answer depending on the age of the child. A three year old will most likely be happy to know yes you came from inside of me (placing your hand on your abdomen). An older child may well be asking "Did I come from the same place that your food goes?" And of course a teenager, though they may not know the answer to either question, will probably never ask.

A couple more factors you may want to consider is your commitment to the truth, and the amount of time you have to answer the question. If you do not know the answer; look it up together.

Nothing will build your communication with your child better than to be open about the need to look up an answer. It is ok to say I will talk to you later if you really mean it. I suggest you give the time you intend to answer the question as it will make it easier to actually answer the question later. As opposed to rejoicing in the fact you evaded the question for a while. Remember my son's earlier quote.

When it comes to talking about difficult topics with our little ones. It is important to answer the questions as they come. Think about the age of the child asking the question. Make the time to answer the question completely. And if you do not know the answer; look it up.

I have found that another family member, a grandparent, a clergy member, a therapist and countless others may be able to assist. One word of caution: If you use the internet to look up information you need to do this on your own first, or you and your child may get a shock that you are not ready to explain.

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