

*Prepared by and presented with permission from the Family Institute of Cambridge*

1. Invite your children to talk about difficult matters, even if this makes you uncomfortable.
2. Create a safe space for conversation.
3. Assure the child of confidentiality: “This is a private conversation.”
4. Welcome all feelings: “However you feel is ok.”
5. Value multiple perspectives. Be ready to tolerate statements like, “I hate you”; “Fr. Fred is weird”; or “I wish I were dead.”
6. Normalize difficult conversations. Don't make difficult conversation a once-in-a-lifetime conversation. Talk about these things often and in a variety of ways.
7. Talk *about* talking about it—talk about why particular subjects are difficult to discuss and what can be done to make a conversation easier for all parties.
8. Don't be mysterious—be transparent and be sure to explain why these conversations are important.
9. Listen for meaning, not for facts.
10. Be curious. Listen for the unusual.

Helpful barometers or indications that your child might be in trouble include depression, anxiety, sleep difficulty, aggressive behavior, drug or alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, avoidance of all things sexual, refusal to go to school, fascination with fire, or suicidal statements.

If your child exhibits any of these behaviors it is essential that you work to understand the meaning of the behaviors, directly with your child and with professional help.