

Preschool

CRISIS

PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

... for great conversations with kids

Your toddler/preschooler can have a meltdown over a toy or snack. But what happens when there is a bigger crisis or tragedy in their world, like the death of a loved one or a big move or a divorce? What do you do? What do you say? A preschooler may not be able to verbally express how they are coping, but there are ways to pay attention to your child's non-verbal cues.

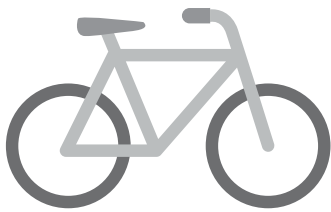
No one knows your preschooler better than you. You will be able to notice if they are in crisis mode before anyone else. Pay attention to changes in behavior (like thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, and clinginess) and provide a consistent, safe, and loving environment for them to heal and grow.

Help them feel secure. When your preschooler is experiencing a crisis, there are some things you can say and do that will help them feel safe. Here are a few ideas:

- "I'm here, you're not alone." (*Listen to their feelings and validate them.*)
- "Why don't we draw/color together." (*Observe how they express themselves symbolically.*)
- "I love watching you play." (*Pay attention to what they mirror, watch how they play and notice changes or regression in their behavior.*)
- "I am always looking out for you."
- "I'll help you when you need it."
- "I'll play with you. I love having time with you." (*Move to their play area or space. Play is their first language.*)
- "He/she died. That means their bodies stopped working." (*Explain in simple clear words. Don't use confusing phrases like, "We lost grandma."*)
- "You are a beautiful, wonderful, child of God."
- "You can know that God is always with you."
- "Even when you feel sad, God loves you."

Make sure to involve professionals, counselors (as needed), as well as your ministry leader.





Elementary

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When a kid experiences crisis, they tend to have more questions than answers. What they're going through might sound minor to you, or be really scary to both of you. Either way, be sensitive to any changes you see in your child, and be careful to respond by offering grace and support along the way.

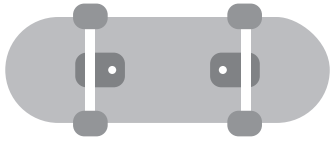
During this phase, your child is building a worldview, so when dealing with a crisis, remember to reiterate what is true. Be honest when you don't have the answers, assure them you're there and they are loved by you—and remind them that God is there, too.

Validate their feelings. When you interact with your child, there are some things that you can say and do to help them feel validated and secure. Here are a few:

- "Some things are changing, and that can be tough. But there are some things that will never change. I love you. God loves you. And we can trust God no matter what."
- "This is what I'm feeling right now, how are you doing?"
- "Can you put words to what you are thinking or feeling? Even if it doesn't all make sense, talking about it can help."
- "Do you have any questions for me?"
- "This doesn't make sense to me either. I can understand how this is confusing for you."
- "I am here whenever you need me."
- "Sometimes, scary things happen in our world, but I want you to know that God is always with you. And you can talk to Him anytime."

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Middle School

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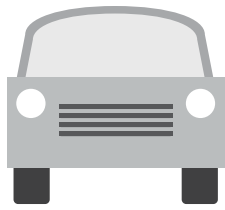
Your middle schooler is changing—their rapidly changing bodies and brains make everything extra interesting, and sometimes extra challenging. When you add to that a cultural or local crisis—like the tragic death of a student or an act of violence in your community—this time in their life can be very difficult. During this time, your goal is to consistently affirm your middle schooler.

Strengthen their resilience. Support and affirm their ability to thrive through the difficult things they might experience. Here are some words to say during these times:

- “I hear you. Keep talking.”
- “When you’re ready to talk, I’m here.”
- “Help me understand.”
- “What do you wish I knew about all of this?”
- “This really stinks. It’s bad. I’m sorry.”
- “I’m not trying to fix it. I just want to be here for you.”
- “I don’t think I have an answer, but I can sit here with you.”
- “I believe you have what it takes to get through this, and I’ll help you.”
- “How are your friends handling this situation. . . What about you, how does it make you feel?”
- “It might be helpful if you talked to someone besides me. Would you be willing to meet with a counselor/Small Group Leader/coach?”
- “Scary things happen in the world we live in. It’s okay if that worries you/makes you afraid. You can always stop, pray, and ask God to give you courage.”

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High School

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With teenagers, it seems that pressures increase along with their responsibilities. The potential for them to experience a crisis—whether from their own decisions or from the actions or decisions of others—also increases.

Teenagers will tend to go to others in their circle for support, like their peers and even social media. They likely won't come running to you. So when a crisis happens, initiate the conversation.

Encourage without adding pressure. See your teenager for the adult they are soon becoming, and offer more help if they need it. When you come alongside them instead of trying to fix things for them, or adding more pressure, it helps them to open up to you and not shut down.

Here are a few ideas of what to say to enter into their world so that you can offer your support and show them how much you believe in their potential:

- "I'm listening. Tell me what you're thinking when you are ready."
- "How are your friends handling this? . . . What about you, how are you processing it?"
- "It seems like you might be feeling _____. Am I right?"
- "This is how I'm doing, how are you feeling?" (*Putting words to your feelings helps them put words to theirs.*)
- "I don't have all the answers. It might help if you talked with a counselor/pastor/coach. Would you like me to help connect you?"
- "You may not feel like you have what it takes to get through this, but we (me, your Small Group Leaders, your friends) will sit with you until you can make your next step."
- "Scary things do happen in our world. But God is always with you. You can talk to Him anytime, anywhere."
- "It's okay to feel confused about this situation."
- "When you're ready to talk about it, let me know."

Make sure to involve professionals, counselors (as needed), as well as your ministry leader.

