



What to do
WHEN your child
asks about
abortion

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THIS GUIDE IS INTENDED TO HELP ALL PARENTS AND SUPPORT DISCUSSIONS AROUND DIFFICULT QUESTIONS THAT MAY ARISE WITH CHILDREN ABOUT REPRODUCTION. WE AIM TO BE INCLUSIVE AND HOLISTIC IN THESE CONVERSATIONS BY OFFERING SEVERAL TIPS/SUGGESTIONS TO ADDRESS ANY GIVEN FAMILY'S NEEDS

Roe v Wade is Overturned. Now what do we do as parents?



ABORTION AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Although reproductive rights are currently under question, as parents, it is important to remember the generational consequences. It is likely that our children will grow up in a world where their rights to reproductive and medical care is much more limited than recent generations past. This means that many (especially older children) are likely experiencing a multitude of emotions and have a lot of questions about their future. Questions about abortion are not a matter of **IF**, but rather **WHEN**. As parents we should prepare for these questions.

Discussions about abortion and reproductive rights helps promote empathy, bodily consent/safety, self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and advocacy

How to explain the physicality of abortion:

FOR YOUNG CHILDREN PREK/ELEMENTARY AGED:

Keep the conversation simple and **factual**. Talk about how sometimes when people become pregnant/start growing a baby they may not chose to have the baby for many different reasons (see reasoning discussions below). Having a baby is a **choice** the parents get to make. If they choose they cannot/do not want to have the baby, they go to a specialty doctor who helps them stop their pregnancy by giving medicine or surgery.



FOR MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLERS:

You can be more explicit in discussing what the medical procedures may be and the physical impacts on the individual. You may even consider discussing these processes in detail so that a child better understands the procedures involved. Part of reducing stigma is demystifying experiences and this is done through knowledge, discussion, and education.

How to explain the emotional aspect of abortion:



YOUNG CHILDREN:

Explain that sometimes when someone decides not to have a baby there may be lots of feelings that come up. **Some people may feel sad, scared, angry, and even happy. Sometimes people may feel lots of these feelings at the same time.** Can you think of a time you've felt X emotion?

How to explain the emotional aspect of abortion:

MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOLERS:

Have open discussions that avoid judgments of emotions.

Remind them that an individual can experience a range of emotions when considering abortion. These feelings may be sadness, fear, anger, disappointment, but can also be joy and relief. You can have multiple different feelings at the same time and there are no right or wrong feelings.

For this age group also **check in about current events**. Ask them what they have heard and what their thoughts are around the topic. Many youth may be experiencing fear related to the recent news and may need safe spaces to process these fears.

Be open to a difference in opinion. Adolescence is an age of identity development and this age group may have opinions/thoughts on abortion that may be different from yours. It is also possible that their opinions will change over time and reflect a process of learning. Listen to their feelings and always keep information factual.

Lastly, make sure you **assess and process your own emotions** around the events. Your teens may ask your thoughts and emotions and having done your own internal work, you may feel more prepared to face their emotions. It is also ok to share honestly your fears and uncertainty around the recent news.

How to explain **WHY** someone may choose an abortion:

YOUNG CHILDREN:

Someone might choose not to have a baby because they aren't ready or they don't want to be a parent. Taking care of a baby can be lots of work that takes lots of time and money. Sometimes a person may want to save up and wait for a better time. Some people may not want a baby at all and that's ok too. It is a person's choice to decide.

With this age you can try and use analogies and examples of choice and timing.

For example:

- **"You know how you love to go to the pool, but sometimes it's too cold to swim in the pool and we have to wait until the summertime when it's hot enough to swim in the pool." (Discuss timing)**
- **"Sometimes it's like learning to drive a car. When we want to drive a car we have to make sure we have the skills and have access to a car. This might mean we have to wait a little while or save up to take classes/buy a car." (Discuss finances/timing/resources)**
- **"People have choices they can make with their bodies. Just like you can choose who and when you want to give hugs/kisses."**

How to explain **WHY** someone may choose an abortion:

MIDDLE-HIGH SCHOOLERS:

With this age range you can have more direct and explicit discussions around timing, finances, desire, support, medical need, choice etc. Again, keep these conversations holistic and comprehensive so that you are considering all the different reasons why someone may choose abortion. When discussing these various reasons be sure to avoid judgement of circumstances.

You can ask this age range open-ended questions to prompt critical thinking.

For example:

“Why might someone choose abortion?”

“Has there ever been a time you couldn’t control something? How did that make you feel? What challenges/things kept you from being in control in that situation?”

“How would it feel if you lost an ability to make a choice for yourself/body”

How to explain consent and bodily autonomy to children:

It's important to remember that **teaching consent is protective against sexual harm**. Children from young ages should learn that they can deny physical advances that make them uncomfortable even from loved ones (for example, many times sexual victimization occurs from known individuals or even family members). If children gain agency over their bodies they are more likely to disclose unwanted and harmful advances. To teach consent you can teach children:

YOUNG CHILDREN:

Teach anatomically correct terms for genitalia. There is a discomfort in adults to use the terms at this young age due to stigma and taboos, but using correct terms keep our children safe and avoid confusion when discussing private parts. This helps prevent child sexual abuse.

Teach your children it is OK to say “no” to hugs and unwanted physical touch and respect their boundaries. You can practice or offer choices in how they want to communicate their affection (if they want to at all). **For example, “Would you like to give a high five or fist bump grandma instead?”**

How to explain consent and bodily autonomy to children:

SLIGHTLY OLDER CHILDREN:

Along with teaching anatomically correct terms and boundary-setting with “no,” also **teach them the difference between good secrets and bad secrets.**

For example:

"good secrets are like surprises on a birthday party, no one gets hurt. Bad secrets are ones that we keep from trusted adults and that can hurt you or someone else."

Sexual perpetration of children is maintained through secrecy and threats of harm if secrecy is not maintained. Ensuring children know the difference in types of secrecy is critical for exposing harmful behaviors.



How to explain consent and bodily autonomy to children:



ADOLESCENTS:

At this age you can have more complex conversations about consent. In an evolving technological landscape, preparing our teens to face the nuances of the world will require discussions about what is safe and respectful across various settings (e.g. risks associated with sexting and other behaviors). It will be important to discuss consent within the context of romantic relationships, friendships, bodily expression, and social media posts etc. Also, remember to emphasize that they have the right to withdraw consent at any time and it's OK to change their minds about something they once agreed to.

Here, you can use TV shows or movies to discuss scenarios and how your child may have felt/responded in that given situation. You can problem-solve together better ways to address issues related to body autonomy and make a plan that involves open discussion if they ever feel unsafe or harmed.

Should we be concerned about having these conversations with young children?

As long as the conversations are developmentally appropriate as discussed above, it is absolutely OK to have discussions at a young age. You are not exposing children to “sexualized” content, you are simply providing correct terminology and education. Access to safe and open conversations helps mitigate mental health concerns in development and strengthens parent-child relationships. Children who feel they have even one supportive adult in their life that they can confide in, report significant mental health protections. Open conversations in adolescence also prepares children to be more kind, empathic, and respectful in their own romantic relationships and beyond. Many times our hesitations around these topics are informed by our own upbringings and the cultural taboos associated with these discussions, therefore, it is always important us adults do our own introspection and internal work before we have these discussions with adolescents.

