

Reflection

How comfortable do you feel talking about crisis? Why do you think that is?

What worked or didn't work in your conversation?

What is one action step you don't want to forget?

Next Steps

Practical Steps for After the Conversation

- 1 When kids are upset, first offer to meet their most basic needs. Give them a few choices that will help them calm down, like a drink, a snack, a hug, or a stuffed animal.
- 2 Life is very busy. Don't forget to schedule unstructured play or "down time" in addition to regular school or more formal extracurricular activities.
- 3 Transitions from one thing to another (especially if a child isn't expecting it or is already feeling upset) can be thought through in advance. Pack a "go" bag of items or give them visual and verbal cues when a transition is coming.



Resources

For additional resources to help you navigate conversations about crisis, check out parentcue.org for the following:

Listen

Parent Cue Live Podcast: Episode 66
How to Talk To Your Kid About Crisis

Download

The Feelings Wheel

Learn

Parenting With Mental Health in Mind Course

Read

Helping Your Child Through Grief
Article by Sissy Goff

Find a Therapist

Find therapists who specialize in preschoolers in crisis at goodtherapy.org or psychologytoday.com

Conversation Guide

For Parents

Crisis

Preschool



Research shows that four out of six children will experience at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). One out of six will experience four or more ACEs before turning eighteen.¹

Why is it important to talk with your preschooler about crisis?

Research shows that four out of six children will experience at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). One out of six will experience four or more ACEs before turning eighteen.¹

What exactly *is* a crisis in the toddler years? Sometimes, a lost teddy bear or a massive diaper blowout can feel like an intense moment (both to the child and the parents!), but in reality, we know, for most kids, everyday experiences are hardly a crisis.. A crisis, for a preschooler, may look more like the loss of a family member, a change in living arrangements, a

difficult medical procedure, or even a normal developmental change that just feels really scary. By definition, a crisis is a real or perceived threat that disrupts your child's normal degree of functioning (e.g., physically, emotionally, and/or mentally), thereby requiring an immediate response and support from you.

While we can't prevent all negative experiences, as parents, our job is to help our child feel as safe, in control, connected, and valued as possible. The more support we can gather around our children, the more likely they will heal and thrive when bad things happen. Childhood is the time when we can help children learn to manage their many thoughts and feelings so that their choices and actions lead to a healthier life full of strong relationships and a positive self-image, confident they can handle difficult things and grow through them.

¹ Fast Facts: Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC
² Joseph, R. Y., et al. "Sensory Modulation Dysfunction in Child Victims of Trauma: A Scoping Review." *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, vol. 14, no. 4, Springer Science and Business Media LLC, Jan. 2021, pp. 455-70.

Tips to Help Preschoolers Navigate Crisis

When to Have the Conversation

As parents and caregivers, our role is to be responsive to our children's needs and follow through in consistently meeting them. This builds a trusting relationship. Hard situations like the death of a loved one or someone moving away lead to big feelings, and our empathy-filled response can help them move beyond the "fight, flight, or freeze" responses to realize they aren't completely powerless. You can help instill in them the mindset to work hard, make good choices, and continue on—also known as growth mindset.

Before the Conversation

1. Understand this phase: Your role is to embrace their physical needs.

Young children experience the world like artists—using all their senses to take it all in. This means that crisis and trauma can feel very overwhelming and cause them to respond by lashing out, running away, or curling up tight. A preschooler may not be able to express how they are coping verbally, but they show us in other ways if we pay attention to their non-verbal cues.

No one knows your preschooler better than you. You can notice if they are in crisis mode before anyone else. Look for changes in behavior (like thumb-sucking, bed-wetting, and clinginess) and try to provide a

consistent, safe, and loving environment for them to heal and grow.

2. Sit with this question: What is my end goal for this conversation?

As parents, we want our children to feel safe even during uncomfortable or difficult times and to know that even when life is challenging, they will have the support they need.

As they get older, we want our kids to gain confidence in their ability to communicate when things are hard and to reach out for support from trustworthy people.

Think About This

1. What do you want your kid to know?
2. What phrase or sentence do you **most** want them to hear?
3. Who is a safe person you can call before and/or after the conversation to say all the things you probably shouldn't say to your preschooler?



Tips to Having the Conversation

Get on eye level with your child as much as possible. Some kids feel nervous by direct eye contact, so you can also try rolling a ball or coloring side by side to see if they relax and open up more.

When things feel very chaotic in a child's life, help keep the environment and schedule as predictable and orderly as possible. Depending on their age, kids might really like to see a visual schedule for the day or even the week.

Create a calm space just off the side of a main area that can get really busy, like the kitchen. Get the kids to help to make it cozy and fill it with things that can help them calm down if they are upset and need a break.

Use simple games with colorful pieces like Candyland®, Uno®, and Twister® to add an element of play. Incorporate feeling words. For example, when you play or touch something red, share what you love or what makes you angry with yellow, blue for sadness, and green for happy feelings.

Have a bin of nurturing-type toys that allow kids to care for something else, like a baby doll with accessories or stuffed animals with a veterinary kit.

Get the Conversation Started

"Let's draw/color together."

"God made you. You're special."

"You can talk to God about what makes you mad or sad."

"I'll help you when you need it."

"I'll play with you. I love having time with you."

"I'll help you when you need it."

"I'm always looking out for you."

"I'm here, you're not alone."

"When someone dies, it means their body stopped working."