

# 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](https://parentcue.org) for the following:

### Listen

**Parent Cue Live Podcast: Episode 65**  
How to Recognize When Your Kid is in 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 elementary kids in crisis at [goodtherapy.org](https://goodtherapy.org) or [psychologytoday.com](https://psychologytoday.com)

# Conversation Guide

# For Parents

# Crisis

# Elementary



In recent years, the acronym ACE (or Adverse Childhood Experiences) has been used to describe difficult, painful, or traumatic events that may happen in the elementary school years.<sup>1</sup>

## Why is it important to talk with your kid about crisis?

In recent years, the acronym ACE (or Adverse Childhood Experiences) has been used to describe difficult, painful, or traumatic events that may happen in the elementary school years. Research demonstrates these adverse events (experienced by four out of six kids) can affect their future health and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

It's hard to think about little kids experiencing crisis, but research would indicate it's more likely than we may think. In the elementary years, a crisis may look more like the loss of a family member, a change in living arrangements, being bullied, a best friend

moving away, a natural disaster, 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 control every crisis event in our world, there is some good news. Parents are uniquely positioned to help their child heal<sup>2</sup> and move forward. 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 Williams, C., & Hutcherson, W. (2020). *Seen: Healing Despair in kids and teenagers through the power of connection*. Orange Books.

# Tips to Help Kids Navigate Crisis

## When to Have the Conversation

When elementary-aged kids feel overwhelmed, they might act out, run from the situation, or even try to hide from it. They might not have the verbal ability to express clearly what's going on, but they will usually show us in other ways if we are paying attention to their non-verbal cues.

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

## Before the Conversation

1. Understand this phase: Your role during this phase is to engage their interests.

We know that elementary-age kids think like scientists. So when they experience a crisis, they tend to have more questions than ever. Sometimes you will have answers, but oftentimes they will need your closeness and support even more than the “right answer” to every question. As young brains are developing, they see events differently than adults. What feels traumatic to them, might feel minor to you, or it could feel really scary to you both.

Elementary-age kids are also motivated

by fun, so we should play as often as possible on their level, both initiating activities with them and following their lead for what they need. We can leverage things like playing games and music to help children think through their feelings more easily and then encourage talking about those feelings with us in ways that feel safe.

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

As parents, we know that our children are actively building a worldview—how they think the world works and how they fit into it. So we must be sensitive to any changes we see in our child and respond. When they are upset by a crisis that creates big questions, we can remind them of what we do know is true, good, and real. Assure them you're here for them and you deeply love them—and that God is there and loves them too.

## 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 kid?



## 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.

Use simple games with colorful pieces like Candyland®, Uno®, and Twister® to add an element of play. Incorporate feeling identification. 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.

During meals or car rides, try using things like Table Topics® or the UnGame® cards to get the conversation flowing and continue to learn new things about each other.

Create a special area just for kids to play out any anger in safe ways, like with foam swords and inflatable “bop” bags for punching and kicking.

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.

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

“God's love for you will never change.”

“My love for you will never change.”

“What are you reading or listening to? I like hearing what you like these days.”

“Today I'm feeling sad. How are you feeling?”

“What might help? A hug, a snack, or a walk?”

“Tell me more about that.”

“You don't have to pretend with me. You can tell me how you really feel.”

“This doesn't make sense to me either.”

“Let's look for the helpers—people jumping into the situation to help make things better—together.”

“I am here whenever you need me.”