

# teaching the tangly topics

## FACING POTENTIALLY SCARY CONTENT WITH YOUR CHILDREN

1. Use open-ended questions that allow kids to really process what they've heard.
2. Think through different strategies for teaching different subjects. Some questions are better for literature (fiction/make-believe), and other questions are better for history and science (reality).
3. Try to spare any unnecessary disturbing details, images, and video footage of history or news events.
4. Ask children what they think happened, and listen to them speak or write it back to you. Take stock of any scary fantasies, inaccuracies, or frightening conclusions they've drawn that may not be accurate.
5. Ask students about their feelings and allow space for emotion when talking about something tragic, sad, or difficult. Help them understand that feeling these emotions are natural, and often, appropriate.
6. If a child is upset, try not to dismiss their emotions or alleviate the pain they are feeling by saying "don't cry; it's okay" or "that happened a long time ago — that's just how things were." Instead, validate when they feel sad or scared so that they know their feelings are natural.
7. If a topic makes you feel sad, too, you can share your feelings with them.
8. Reassure the child that you and other teachers, parents, and adults love them and are working hard to keep them safe.
9. Mr. Rogers reminds us to "look for the helpers" and to learn about those who did the right thing during a difficult or scary time. Remind children of all the ways that people can take action to make a difference.
10. According to PBS, if young children want to play to process something difficult, it may help to encourage children to act out empowering roles and imagine themselves as helpers, not victims or villains. The right kind of play can be very helpful, but the wrong kind of play can turn a tough topic into entertainment/escapism or can make a child even more scared than they were before!
11. Remember -- we are all doing our best, and we can't always predict what will frighten or disturb a student. However, how we respond when a student feels scared will contribute to how they process their negative emotions. When we teach a hard topic, we have a unique opportunity to help our students become stronger, wiser, emotionally healthy people with strong moral compasses! We encourage you to lean into these conversations and handle them with mindful care. Helping our children work through these tricky topics will pay dividends and help them develop into healthy adults.