
Answering Children's Difficult Questions

INSTRUCTIONS

This handout was designed for use with the article, "When Kids Ask (Really) Tough Questions: A Quick Guide," from NPR. The questions and activities in this handout could be used in a work session (e.g., professional learning community, professional development session), for individual coaching, or for self-reflection.

Goals

- ◆ Understand how asking difficult questions, especially after a traumatic experience, may be a part of children's growing inquiry skills.
- ◆ Identify the children in your care who may have experienced trauma and reflect on your responses to their difficult questions.
- ◆ Develop a plan to support preschoolers' inquiry skills by answering their difficult questions.

Activity

- ◆ Read the article.
- ◆ After reading, use the questions below to guide your action plan.
- ◆ Implement your plan and adjust as needed to support preschoolers' inquiry skills.

Often when kids grapple with a scary or uncertain subject, their questions will have one fundamental motivation: *What's going to happen to me? Will I be safe? Will I be taken care of?*

Cory Turner & Anya Kamenetz

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- ◆ What caught your attention from the article? What made that fact, excerpt, or example meaningful to you?

- ◆ Inquiry involves preschoolers asking questions to learn more about the world around them. Children may have questions after experiencing a traumatic or difficult event. Educators may not always have the answers to these questions, and that's okay!
 - What kinds of questions might children ask after a traumatic or difficult experience?
 - What might children learn by asking difficult questions?
 - How might this questioning demonstrate children's growing inquiry skills?

- ◆ Consider a time when a child in your care who has experienced trauma asked you a difficult question. Reflect upon your interaction:
 - How did you respond to their question? Did you use any of the suggestions provided in the article?
 - How did the child respond to your answer?
 - What might the child have learned from your interaction? How did you support their growing inquiry skills while being sensitive to their trauma?
 - What challenges arose during the interaction? How did you address these challenges?

- ◆ The article suggests exploring challenging questions together with children, reminding educators that it's okay not to have all the answers.
 - How might this strategy support children's inquiry skills?
 - How can this strategy improve their feelings of safety and self-confidence?
 - How might exploring and answering children's questions be beneficial to both the child *and* adult?

- ◆ Develop a plan to support the inquiry skills of the children in your care who have experienced trauma.
 - Consider how you can:
 - Listen for what the child is *really* asking.
 - Give them facts at a pace they can manage.
 - Engage in research together.
 - Reassure them that they are safe and cared for.
 - Take care of yourself and share your own emotions.
 - Implement your plan and monitor children's progress. Modify your plan as needed to support children's development of inquiry skills.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about supporting children's inquiry skills by responding to difficult questions:

- ◆ **Source:** Greater Good Magazine
 - ◆ **Article:** Nine Tips for Talking with Kids About Trauma
 - ◆ **Link:** [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine tips for talking to kids about trauma](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine-tips-for-talking-to-kids-about-trauma)
 - ◆ **Description:** This article provides additional strategies for discussing trauma with children.
-
- ◆ **Source:** PBS Parents
 - ◆ **Article:** 6 Ways to Talk to You Kids About Illness
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/6-ways-to-talk-to-your-child-about-illness>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article provides tips for discussing traumatic experiences, such as illness, with children and answering their difficult questions.
-
- ◆ **Source:** PBS Parents
 - ◆ **Article:** Welcoming Wonder (and Endless Questions!) with Kids
 - ◆ **Link:** <https://www.pbs.org/parents/thrive/welcoming-wonder-and-endless-questions-with-kids>
 - ◆ **Description:** This article discusses ways to promote children's inquiry skills through questioning.