



PARENT EDUCATION NURSERY SCHOOL
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"What Young Children Need to Know that Grown Ups Find Hard to Talk About: A Discussion With Julie Olsen Edwards"

We were honored to have had Julie Olsen Edwards be the presenter at our annual 3PENS meeting last week. [Julie Olsen Edwards](#) is an educator, author and diversity consultant who has published several books and articles and won several awards for her contributions to early childhood education. For those that were able to attend our annual 3PENS meeting with Julie Olsen Edwards, I know we all walked away feeling inspired. For those who could not attend, we wanted to do a little summary. Here we outline some of the highlights from our parent education night:

1. There are many topics that may be uncomfortable for us to discuss with our children. A few examples include consumerism and comparative wealth issues, violence (guns, wars, etc.), homelessness, sex and sexuality, hunger, gender, strangers, death, and physical differences.
2. We must first get "comfortable" with our views on these topics. When we are not comfortable and clear ourselves, then it will be challenging to discuss these issues with our children. Once we as parents are clear (or clearer) about our views, then it is much easier to have discussions with our children.
3. Children are very aware of what we "don't" talk about. For children, silence = fear. When parents are silent on a topic, children are robbed of a vocabulary for these topics. It leaves them alone to figure it out, which is very scary and confusing.
4. Children's concerns don't always manifest as direct questions. It might manifest in different ways and we need to be alert to this. Listen carefully to our children. If they do ask a question, ask the question back to them as they don't always know how to formulate their questions.
5. It is okay to tell children that "bad things happen sometimes". Children don't always need happy endings. Keep explanations simple and straightforward. For example, "sometimes bad things happen - people work hard to make good things happen."
6. "All people are the same, all people are different". This is an important message for children.
7. "My job is to keep you safe". This is always a parent's priority. Share this with your children.

8. Kids are absolutely tuned into adult's emotions. It is important to talk to our kids even if we stumble. We can always go back to a conversation and clarify with kids. Clear, simple information is what they are looking for.
9. Tone is very important. Keep our tone matter of fact, if we convey anger or fear, our children pick this up.
10. Navigating our consumer culture: our culture tends to "tell" children that their worth is associated with "things". We are geared to provide "rewards" to our children for "good" behavior. We must be careful to monitor this. It is acceptable to tell your children that it's "okay to not have everything".
11. Tip for talking with kids: Use the words "right now" to help navigate hard conversations. For example, "Right now you are missing Sam" or "Right now we can't invite your cousins to our house" or "Right now Grandma is very sick". Using "right now" holds the possibility of change, for ourselves and our children.
12. As parents, we fear that talking about these issues, may increase the behavior or curiosity - in the long run it decreases it, a child's curiosity is satisfied with straightforward information and they move on.
13. The best way to protect your children is for them to know that they can always talk to you. Keep talking to your children, answer their questions, define who you are as a family, share your values.