

September 17, 2024

# Empowering Resettled Caregivers to Engage in Difficult Conversations with Their Children

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connecting resettlement experts



# Today's Speakers



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# Learning Objectives



By the end of this session, you will be able to:

1

## DEFINE

stigma and describe how it might impact the way caregivers from different backgrounds communicate with their children

2

## IDENTIFY

three difficult conversation topics that may be especially challenging to navigate for newcomer families

3

## EXPLAIN

why it is important for caregivers to have difficult conversations with their children

4

## APPLY

three techniques to assist resettled caregivers in preparing for difficult conversations with their children



1

# **Defining Stigma**

And Its Impact on Caregiver-Child Communication

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**How do you define stigma?**

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# What is stigma?

- A mark of shame or disgrace associated with particular qualities, circumstances, people, and/or topics in a given community

“It’s how we internalize the outside world’s beliefs about US.” —Robyne Hanley-Dafoe, EdD

# Difficult Conversations

- While it may be **uncomfortable, stressful, or unnatural** for a caregiver, caregivers should know that having challenging conversations with their child can help **develop a strong relationship built on trust** and open communication



# What Makes These Conversations Difficult?



Differences in parenting style over multiple generations affect the way caregivers approach certain topics

Children might be afraid to approach certain topics because of cultural and family norms

Certain topics may not have been discussed in the caregiver's own childhood

Newcomer caregivers may have different expectations about what can and cannot be discussed

Caregivers may feel that children are too young to discuss certain topics

Children may want to talk to their parents but are afraid of burdening them





2

# **Navigating Difficult Conversation Topics**

Specific Guidance for Caregivers

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**In your experience, which topics have the newcomer caregivers you worked with found especially difficult to discuss with their children?**



# Examples of Topics That Can Be Difficult

for Newcomer Caregivers to Have With Their Children

1

**Questions about  
resettlement and  
the events that  
preceded it**

2

**Puberty**

3

**Alcohol and  
drugs**

4

**Discrimination  
and bullying in  
school and in  
the community**

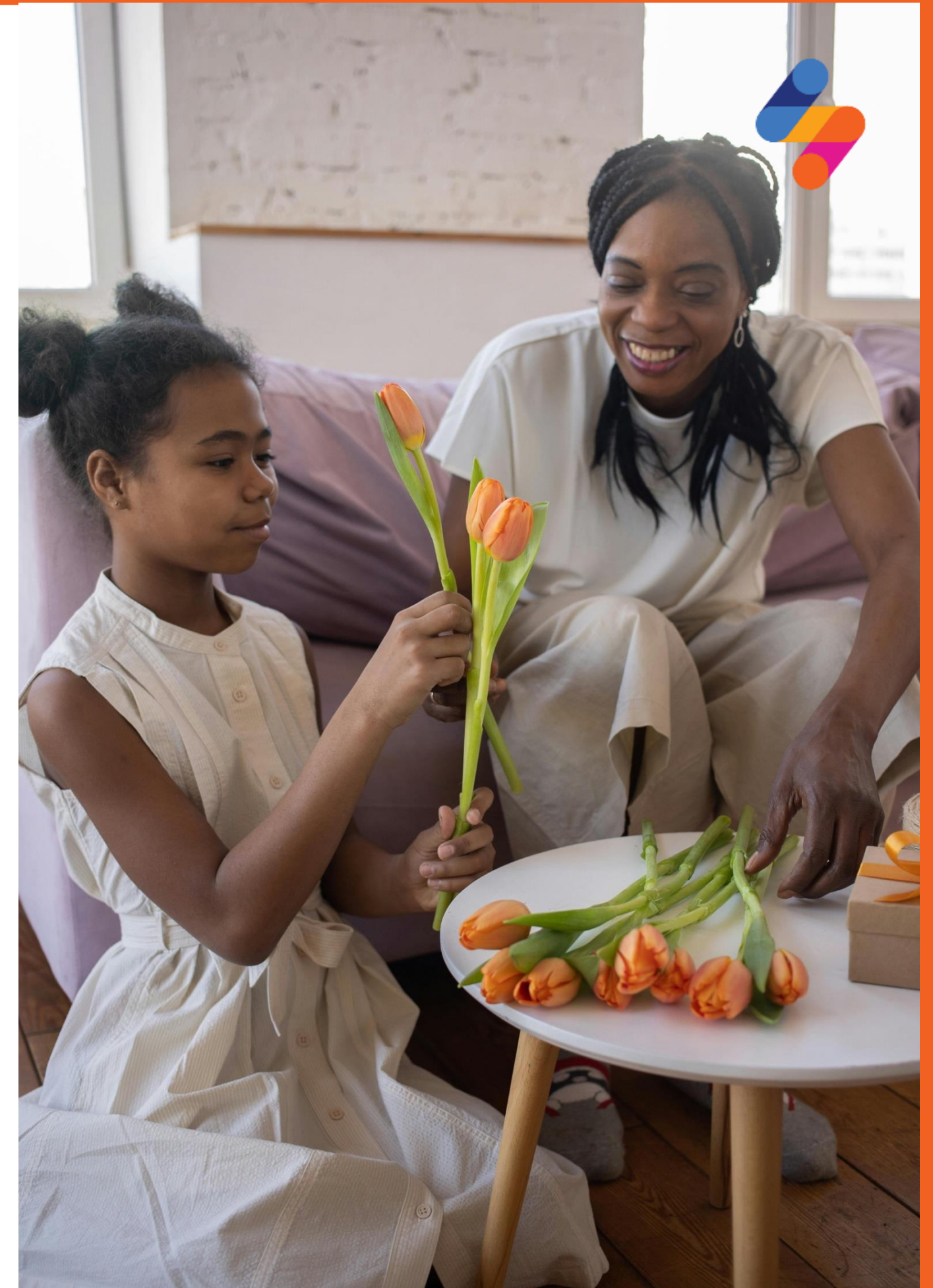
# Resettlement Questions

- Provide age-appropriate information
- Speak calmly while welcoming strong feelings about the situation
- Use as an opportunity to discuss the future and ways to cope together
- Create a welcoming space to allow conversations



# The Puberty Talk

- Don't delay the talk; it's better early than late
- Try to project confidence and avoid looking uncomfortable or embarrassed
- Anchor the talk in everyday situations
- Don't lean on euphemisms to describe sensitive topics (e.g., genitalia); use the proper words
- Keep things short when talking to younger children





# Alcohol and Drugs

- Steer the topic(s) of conversation based on what is age-appropriate
- Review facts about drugs and alcohol before starting the conversation
- Approach conversations with curiosity rather than with accusation or fear
- Educate children on how to turn down drugs or alcohol if offered



# Discrimination and Bullying



- Pay attention to your own reactions and approach in a calm manner
- Listen to your children and ask questions to best understand how they are feeling
- Begin by asking what children already know
- Remind children it is okay to have strong feelings
- Establish a sense of safety



# General Guidance for Difficult Discussions



- Maintain honest explanations
- Model adaptive ways to react to difficult situations
- Explain situations in an age-appropriate manner
- Look for a good time to have a conversation



# Phrases Caregivers Can Use

During Difficult Conversations with Their Children



“How does that make you feel?”  
“Thank you for telling me how you’re feeling.”

“I’m not sure about that. I’ll do some thinking, and we can talk about it again tomorrow.”

“How would you feel if...?”

“You can always talk to me.”

“Give me a minute to think through what you’ve said.”

“I’m here for you.”



3

# The Importance of Difficult Conversations

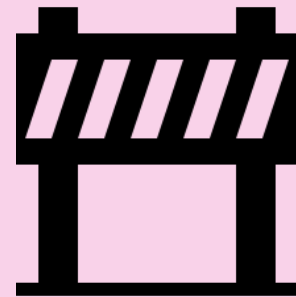
How Open Communication Impacts Children



# Why are these conversations important?



Children may need help processing what they see or hear in the media and from their peers



Avoiding topics can convey to children that they are unacceptable to discuss



Discussing difficult topics can make children feel safer and strengthen family relationships

# How do difficult conversations create positive impact?



- Emotionally responsive parenting is associated with positive developmental outcomes for children and adolescents, including social development, emotional security, and intellectual achievement
- Parental support can help minimize risk of depression and anxiety

“When children have candid, trusting communication with others—parents, teachers, siblings—they get to practice processing their experiences and discover new ways of coping.”

—Gene Beresin, Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds



# Case Scenario: The Hassan Family

- The Hassan family includes Omar, Fatuma, and their five children
- They are new arrivals from Somalia who identify as Muslim
- The family has a case manager, Idil, who they see monthly
- One of the Hassan children, Maryam, 11, is being bullied at school for wearing a hijab
- Omar and Fatuma tell Maryam not to let it bother her
- They notice Maryam is resistant to go to school and sad most days, but are not sure if the bullying has continued



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**What are ways that Omar and Fatuma could talk with Maryam about her bullying experience?**

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# Case Scenario: The Hassan Family (cont'd)

- Idil educates the family on bullying in U.S. schools
- Omar and Fatuma tell Idil about their own experiences of discrimination in public
- Omar expresses anxiety about news stories of Islamophobic hate crimes
- Idil validates Omar and Fatuma's anxieties, while also celebrating their ability to overcome challenges in a new environment
- Omar and Fatuma think that Maryam may be too young to discuss sensitive subjects like discrimination
- Idil explains why it can be important to have these conversations with Maryam, and also advises them on how to approach the topic appropriately
- Omar and Fatuma report taking Idil's advice and having a productive conversation with Maryam
- Omar and Fatuma arrange a meeting with Maryam's teacher



4

# **Applying Key Techniques**

To Help Caregivers Lead Difficult Conversations



# Techniques to Assist Resettled Caregivers

Having Difficult Conversations with Their Children



**Have a culturally sensitive approach**



**Validate concerns and empathize**

**Provide accurate information**

**Make a plan**



# **Have a culturally sensitive approach**



- Communicate with respect to others' cultures and background
- Practice non-judgment
- Provide tailored resources



# **Validate Concerns and Empathize**



- Ask about their thoughts and feelings with a topic or situation
- Practice active listening
- Put yourself in their shoes
- Acknowledge their feelings
- Remind caregivers of their strengths



# Provide Accurate Information



- Ask if there are any questions or uncertainties
- Do your own research if need be
- Recognize what resources are most helpful



# Make a Plan



- Problem solve together
- Role play the conversation
- Identify concrete action steps
- Provide support as needed

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**What is one key takeaway from this training that you will use to help resettled caregivers have difficult conversations with their children?**

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# Q&A Panel



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# Recommended Resources



- [How to Talk to Children About Difficult News](#)
- [Talking to Your Child About Puberty](#)
- [How to Talk with Your Kids About Puberty](#)
- [Raising A Girl: A Handbook for Newcomer Mothers and Daughters](#)
- [Immigrants and Substance Use Disorders: A Legal and Medical Perspective](#)
- [Abusing Alcohol and Drugs](#)
- [The Sesame Workshop](#)
- [Talking About Bullying With Children and Families](#)
- [Bullying Prevention and Response When Supporting Students](#)
- [Muslim Refugee Youth: Stories and Strategies Addressing Discrimination and Bullying](#)

The screenshot shows the Switchboard website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Switchboard logo and menu items: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, LEARNING, RESOURCES, RESEARCH, EVENTS, and ABOUT. Below the navigation bar is a search bar with the placeholder text "Search All Switchboard". The main content area features a featured webinar titled "Muslim Refugee Youth: Stories & Strategies Addressing Discrimination & Bullying". The webinar is marked as an "Archived Webinar". The thumbnail image shows two young girls in hijabs sitting at a table, looking at books. To the right of the thumbnail is a text description of the webinar, which discusses anti-Muslim sentiment and provides best practices for supporting Muslim refugee youth. Below the text is a video player showing a slide with the title "Muslim Refugee Youth: Stories & Strategies Addressing Discrimination & Bullying" and a list of bullet points: "No monolithic interpretation of the Quran's meaning.", "Multiple schools of Islamic jurisprudence.", and "No single codified text of 'Islamic law.'". The video player also shows a "Watch on YouTube" button.



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- 60 seconds
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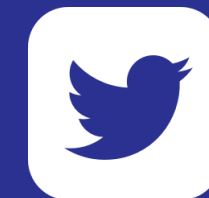
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The IRC received competitive funding through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant #90RB0052 and Grant #90RB0053. The project is 100% financed by federal funds. The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.