

When hard conversations have to happen

“I wish we didn’t have to talk about this.”

What parent hasn’t thought or uttered these words, taking a deep breath before jumping into a hard conversation with their child? Whether a crisis at home, a conflict at school or an atrocity in the news, tough subjects are unavoidable in families.

The recent sex abuse scandals that are rocking our church are no exception.

Much as we may wish to shield our children entirely, we cannot. The world is broken in more ways than we can count. As youth grow, they will come to know these hard and horrible truths, too.

So how can we broach this topic faithfully at home? Here are three ways to start the hard conversations about what’s happening in our church.

First, talk with your spouse.

Today most of our news comes straight to the phones in our pockets. Instead of sharing the morning newspaper, couples are now more likely to scroll through news headlines on their own computers or devices. We can quickly become isolated in our echo chambers of social media — even in our outrage.

But if you make a point to connect with your spouse regularly about your reactions to the news, you can talk together about how to respond.

This may be the time to commit ourselves to deeper prayer as couples, too. In marriage, asking how God calls us to act in the world involves the spouse to whom we have committed our lives.

St. Teresa of Avila wrote to her sisters with words that exhort us in our own callings: “This is your vocation; this must be your business; these must be your desires; these your tears; these your petitions. ... The world is on fire.”

If the world is burning, let the love of our marriages burn even stronger.

Second, talk with your children.

Tackling sensitive, scary subjects like sexual abuse must be done in age-appropriate ways. But we can start when children are small and continue as they grow, circling back to the most important topics over and over, in a thousand ordinary conversations.

When the daunting becomes daily, we grow into the truth that nothing lies beyond the scope of our concern as families and as followers of Christ. Everything awful in the news can call us forth in faith — not to hide but to act.

“We’ve had enough of exhortations to be silent! Cry out with a hundred thousand tongues. I see that the world is rotten because of silence,” wrote St. Catherine of Siena.

She refused to relent in calling the church to reform in her day. Her witness reminds us that part of our vocation as parents is to teach our children to speak up and not remain silent in the face of evil and injustice.

Third, keep talking.

Today’s 24/7 news cycle will soon forget and lunge after the next scandal. We who are left behind must continue to live with the aftermath.

But if we refuse to forget, if we keep praying for healing, if we keep fighting for justice, then our conversations at home can become part of wider conversations in the church for conversion and change.

“The power of evil men lives on in the cowardice of the good,” said St. John Bosco, who dedicated his life to caring for vulnerable children.

For children’s sake, for our church’s sake, for the sake of our own souls, we cannot choose the easy way out and avoid what is difficult to say or do.

Let us pray for the strength to speak with compassion and courage, at home and at church, today and always.

