

Big Questions, Worries, and Fears:
How to have hard conversations with little children
Dr. Lauren Starnes



1

Meet the Author



Dr. Lauren Starnes
Vice President of Early Childhood Education
Primrose School Franchising Company

2

“

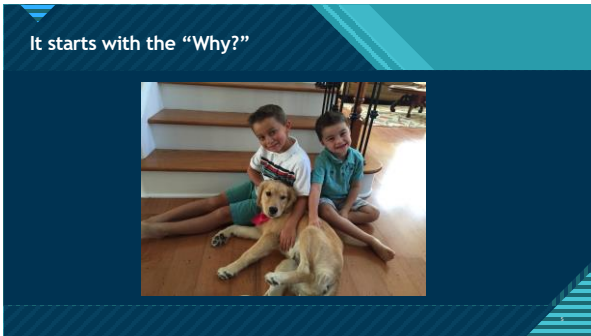


“For the very first time the young are seeing history being made before it is censored by their elders.”
-Margaret Mead

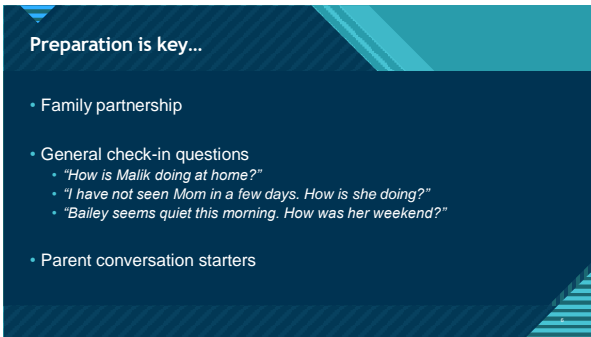
3



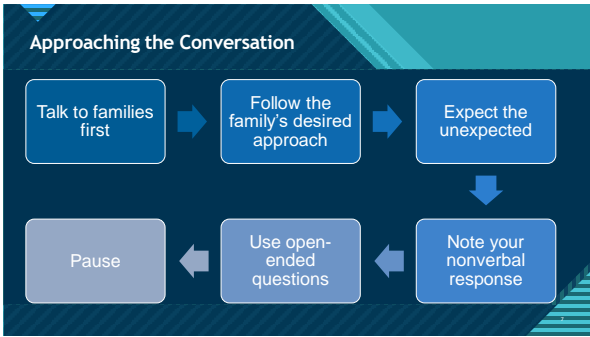
4



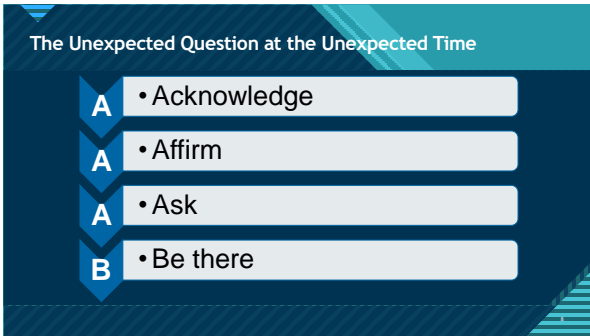
5



6



7



8



9

More Important Considerations


-  Environment and Context
-  Considerations of Family – Religious Preferences
-  Words Used by Family and Known by Child
-  Timeframe of the Concern
-  Child's Understanding of the Impact

10

Poll Questions

11

Miscarriage



In those first few weeks of pregnancy, you mock up an entire life – who the baby is going to look like, where it's going to go to college. That's the loss we suffered.

-Kirstie Alley

12



Processing the Loss

<p><u>Adults</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief cycle • Compounded by potential unknown grieving • Partner struggles • Withdrawal 	<p><u>Young Children</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of conceptual understanding • Feelings of blame • Silence
---	---

13

Withdrawn Teary eyed

Moody Cling at drop-off time

Poor eye contact


Avoiding favorite activities

Little appetite

14

Parent Approaches...

- "Thank you for sharing this with me. I am very sorry. Is this something you think Hiram will bring up? If he does, what would you like me to say to him?"
- "I understand that this is a sensitive time for you and your family. I do have a resource here at the school with information that may help you talk with Colette and Sasha about this in case they have questions at home. Would you like me to give you a copy?"



15

Child Initiates...

Note: Conversations with young children should be child-initiated. Do not initiate a discussion about a sensitive topic unless directed to do so by family.

Cal, to another child: "My mommy was going to have a baby but it died."

Teacher, Ms. Kim (later): "I heard you talking to Sanjay about your mommy. I care a lot about you and your mommy. If you want to talk to me, I am here. Would you like a hug?"

Goal: Presence and emotional comfort

16

Child Initiates...

Tyson, to teacher: "We're not having a baby anymore."

Mr. Xavier: "I did not know that. Thank you for telling me. How do you feel about that?"

Goal: Emotion Identification

17

Child Initiates...

Eva, to teacher (during circle time): "Did you know my mom isn't going to have a new baby? Where did Mommy's baby go?"

Ms. Selena: "Thank you for telling me this, Eva. I want to talk to you and answer your question. Let's finish circle time and then we can talk."

Ms. Selena, to Eva (later): "I understand that you have questions about your Mom's baby. How are you feeling?"

Goal: Support and maintaining focus in group time

18

Following Up



Ms. Kim, to Sanjay: "You shared with me earlier that you were sad your mommy was not going to have a new baby right now. Would you like to talk more about this?" (pause) "Or maybe you'd like to paint a picture of how you are feeling?"

19

Following Up



Ms. Kim, to Sanjay;s family: "I wanted to share with you a conversation I had with Sanjay earlier. In speaking with me, he shared that his mommy was not having a baby anymore. I assured him that he could talk to me and I asked him how he was feeling. Is there anything I can do to support your family? How would you like me to respond to Sanjay if he brings this up again? I do have a resource here at school if that would be helpful."

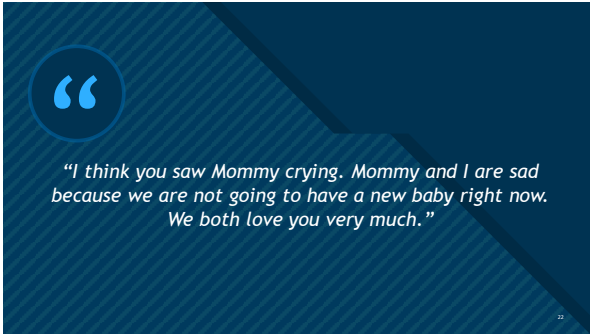
20

Support for Families

- Talking with the Child
 - Developmentally appropriate
 - Answering the question asked or addressing the behavior seen
 - Simple and honest responses
 - Labeling emotions
 - PAUSE



21



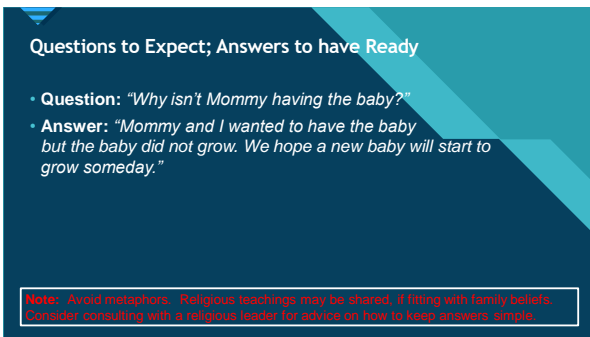
“I think you saw Mommy crying. Mommy and I are sad because we are not going to have a new baby right now. We both love you very much.”

22



Preparation is Key...

23



Questions to Expect; Answers to have Ready

- **Question:** *"Why isn't Mommy having the baby?"*
- **Answer:** *"Mommy and I wanted to have the baby but the baby did not grow. We hope a new baby will start to grow someday."*

Note: Avoid metaphors. Religious teachings may be shared, if fitting with family beliefs. Consider consulting with a religious leader for advice on how to keep answers simple.

24

Questions to Expect; Answers to have Ready

- **Question:** *"Why didn't the baby grow?"*
- **Answer:** *"We do not know why. You did grow when you were a baby, and you are growing healthy and strong. We are very happy for that."*
- **Question:** *"Why is Mama sad?"*
- **Answer:** *"Mama and I love you very much. We wanted to have a brother or sister for you, and we will have to wait. That makes us both feel sad. We are glad we have you."*

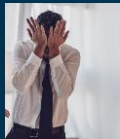
25

Working with young children means always being prepared for the unexpected question at the unexpected time....

26

Unexpected Questions/ Responses... and Why

- Lack of life experience
- Lack of understanding of social norms
- Underdeveloped sense of empathy



Child: *"At least no one else is going to die."*
Adult: *"You are correct that we are all safe. Mommy and I are still very sad that we are not going to have another baby right now."*

27

Unexpected Questions/ Responses... and Why

Child: "That's ok. I don't want a baby."
Adult: "Mommy and I are feeling sad because we did want a baby. But we are so happy that we have you, because we love you very much. Can you help me think of something we can do to show Mommy how much we love her?"

Child: (silence)
Adult: "I am here if you want to talk with me. Would you like a hug?"

28

Resources for Families

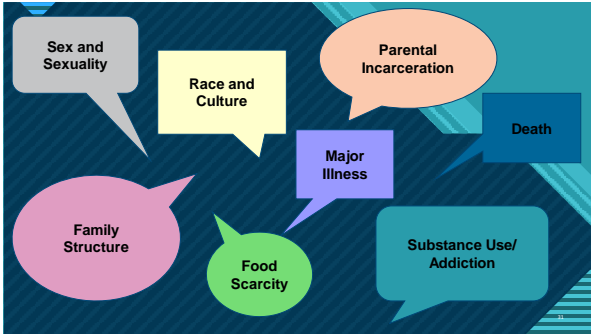
- Families need support to support children – partnership
- How to explain in developmentally appropriate ways
- Questions to expect with possible answers
- Children's books, websites, and organizations to support



29

Poll Questions

30



31



32



33
