ADULTS SAVING KIDS
Founded by Alvin Erickson

Lesson 6

Building a Relationship That Can Handle the Truth

Becoming a Safe Place for Our Children to Turn

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 6:2

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

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Build the Bridge Before It Is Needed

As children grow, they will inevitably encounter situations that frighten, confuse, embarrass, or overwhelm them. Some problems are ordinary childhood difficulties, while others may involve serious mistakes, peer pressure, bullying, threats, or harmful behavior by another person. One of the greatest protections we can give our children is a relationship in which they know they can come to us, even when something has gone terribly wrong.

The time to build that relationship is long before a crisis ever occurs. Children learn whether adults are safe to approach through thousands of ordinary interactions: when they admit a mistake, do we listen before reacting? When they tell us something uncomfortable, do we become angry or try to understand? When they ask difficult questions, do we welcome the conversation or make them regret asking? Our everyday responses help shape whether they will feel safe coming to us tomorrow.

"Come to Us, and We Will Sort It Out Together"

When our children were growing up, we made a simple promise to them. Before they were old enough to drive, we told them, *"If you're ever at a party or somewhere that makes you uncomfortable, just call us. We'll come and get you."* Later, when they were old enough to drive, we added another promise: *"If you ever find you've had too much to drink at a party, don't*

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drive home. Call us, and we'll come get you. No questions asked!" Then we'd smile and add, "*Until the next day!"*

We wanted them to understand that their immediate safety mattered far more to us than our disappointment or frustration. There might be an important conversation the following day, and perhaps consequences to address. But first, we would make sure they were safe. We wanted them to know that asking for help would never create a bigger problem than the situation they were already facing.

Imagine a teenager who has made a serious mistake or become involved in a frightening situation, such as someone threatening to share a private photograph, experimenting with drugs, experiencing bullying, or entering a relationship that feels unsafe. The teenager may already be frightened, ashamed, or worried about disappointing their parents, and if they expect anger, humiliation, or rejection, they may try to hide the situation or handle it alone. But imagine a child who has repeatedly heard:

> *"Whatever happens, you can come to us. You may have made a mistake, or someone may have hurt you. Either way, you don't have to face it alone. We will sort it out together."*

Those words do not promise that there will never be consequences for poor choices, but they promise something far more important: that the parent-child relationship will remain an enduring source of love, protection, and guidance, helping a child seek help before a difficult situation becomes worse.

Listen First, Then Respond

When a child reveals something upsetting, a parent's first reaction can make an enormous difference. While we may feel frightened, angry, disappointed, or overwhelmed ourselves, our child needs to know that telling us was the right decision. We might begin by saying:

- *"Thank you for telling me."*
- *"I'm glad you came to me."*
- *"Let's figure out what we need to do next."*

If the child is in danger or has been harmed, protection comes first, and we should never blame a child for being abused, threatened, or exploited. If the child has made a poor decision, there may be responsibilities and consequences to address, but those conversations can take place while maintaining love and support, ensuring a child never has to choose between telling the truth and feeling loved.

Small Conversations Prepare Us for Big Ones

Trust is rarely built through one dramatic conversation; instead, it develops through ordinary experiences. When a young child admits breaking something and a parent responds calmly to help address the problem, when an older child describes a disagreement and a parent listens rather than immediately taking sides, or when a teenager asks an uncomfortable question and receives an honest, respectful answer, each experience reinforces an important message: *"I can talk to my parents, even when the subject is difficult."*

Parents will not always respond perfectly, but when we react poorly, acknowledging our mistake and apologizing can help repair trust. As children grow older, we can also explain that some situations require involving other responsible adults or professionals to keep them safe, because we should never promise absolute secrecy when someone's safety is at risk. Children also need to know that asking for help is a sign of wisdom, not weakness, especially when a situation feels unsafe or beyond their ability to manage.

Why This Matters for Protecting Children

People who manipulate or exploit children often rely on secrecy, shame, fear, or isolation, telling a child that nobody will believe them, that they will get in trouble, or that their family will be disappointed. A child who has a dependable relationship with a trusted adult may be better positioned to question those threats and seek help.

At the same time, even children from loving, supportive families can be manipulated or harmed, and responsibility always belongs to the person who chooses to exploit or abuse a child. Our goal is simply to make seeking help as safe and accessible as possible so our children know that no mistake, threat, embarrassment, or frightening experience makes them unworthy of love, and that their identity and worth are never determined by what has happened to them.

Questions for Reflection

1. If my child faced a frightening or embarrassing situation, would they feel safe coming to me? What experiences might shape their answer?
2. When my child tells me something difficult, do I respond in a way that encourages future honesty?

THIS WEEK

Put It Into Practice

Have an age-appropriate conversation that reassures your child they can come to you with any problem. You might say:

> *"I want you to know something important. If you ever get into trouble, make a mistake, or someone hurts or frightens you, you can always come to me. We will work through it together."*

Then reinforce those words through your actions when your child shares a small problem this week:

- Give them your attention.
- Listen before offering advice or correction.
- Thank them for telling you.
- Help them consider what to do next.

At the end of the week, ask yourself: *Am I building the kind of relationship my child can depend on when life becomes difficult?*

LOOKING AHEAD

A Thought to Carry Forward

We cannot guarantee that our children will never face danger, make serious mistakes, or encounter people who wish to harm them. But we can work toward becoming someone they know they can turn to without fear of losing our love. The bridge of trust is built through everyday patience, kindness, honesty, and respect, and when a child needs that bridge most, we want it to be strong enough to carry them home.

In our next lesson, we will explore how to help children anticipate consequences and think through decisions before difficult situations arise.