

QUESTIONS THAT STRENGTHEN CONNECTION IN TOUGH TIMES

Questions for Caregivers to Ask Kids
(During Family Crisis or Tough Times)

Where do you feel safest?

This question helps understand where a child experiences the most emotional or physical security. In tough times, knowing a child's "safety zone" supports co-regulation and grounding. It also empowers the child to reflect on their internal and external cues for safety.

What do you need me to know about you?

This gives children voice and agency, which is essential when life feels out of control. It invites them to share something meaningful, whether it's about their identity, needs, or fears. It communicates that their perspective matters.

What makes you feel calm?

A simple but effective way to learn a child's self-regulation tools. Many children in distress don't yet know what soothes them—this opens the door to co-discovery. It also provides caregivers with strategies to use during dysregulated moments.

Who helps you feel better?

Identifying safe people helps strengthen the child's felt sense of relational support. In tough times, it's important to know who they turn to when overwhelmed or afraid. This also helps caregivers build a healthy support team around the child.

What makes your body feel tight or jumpy?

This somatic-based question increases interoception and helps track triggers. Many kids don't yet have the words for emotions but can name body-based sensations. It also gives caregivers insight into moments of stress that may otherwise go unnoticed.

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What do you wish grownups understood?

This question invites honesty and repair. Kids often hold back what they wish adults knew—especially during family stress. Giving them space to express this fosters trust and may reveal deeper needs or misunderstandings.

What does being loved feel like to you?

Love is felt differently by each child. Some feel love through words, others through actions or predictability. This helps caregivers attune to the child's love language and attachment needs.

What makes a hard day worse?

Understanding what escalates stress helps prevent unnecessary rupture. Children often face hidden stressors that adults don't recognize. Naming these gives caregivers the chance to create buffers or rituals that support recovery.

What helps when you feel mad?

Anger is often a protector emotion for deeper hurt or fear. This question helps kids begin to notice their own coping strategies and also shows caregivers how to support them without shaming big feelings. It models emotional literacy.

When do you feel like hiding?

Hiding is a natural response to overwhelm or shame. This question gives insight into moments when a child's nervous system shifts into shutdown. It also tells caregivers when connection, not correction, is most needed.

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What do you dream about when you're asleep or awake?

Dreams can be symbolic of hope, fear, or longing. Whether nightmares or daydreams, they offer a window into a child's internal world. This helps caregivers understand both subconscious distress and imaginative strengths.

What do you like most about yourself?

Tough times can erode a child's sense of self. This question helps reconnect them to their strengths and self-worth. It also allows caregivers to mirror and affirm those positive traits.

What does "home" feel like to you?

"Home" is more than a place—it's a feeling. Asking this uncovers what contributes to a child's sense of belonging and security. It also helps caregivers recreate those conditions during transitions or instability.

How do you know someone is safe?

Safety isn't always obvious to children—especially those with trauma. This builds skills in boundary-setting and discernment. It also helps caregivers model what safe adults do and say.

When is it hardest to talk?

Kids often shut down when overwhelmed or scared. Knowing when words disappear helps caregivers avoid pressuring the child to "talk it out" in the wrong moments. It fosters emotional pacing and trust.

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What rules don't make sense to you?

Rules can feel arbitrary during tough times or change. This gives kids a chance to voice confusion or frustration without punishment. It also allows opportunities to explain the why behind boundaries or adjust them to meet current needs.

What do you do when you feel scared?

This reveals a child's current coping strategies, whether adaptive or not. Some may lash out, freeze, or self-isolate. Understanding this helps caregivers respond in trauma-informed ways rather than discipline-based ones.

What's something you wish you could change?

Tough times often strips away a child's sense of control. Asking this invites them to name hopes, frustrations, or what's not working. It builds agency, even if the situation itself can't fully change.

What does your body need right now?

This builds somatic awareness and can highlight basic needs like rest, food, movement, or touch. It helps kids tune into their internal world and teaches caregivers how to meet nonverbal cues more effectively.

What happens when you try to ask for help?

Kids in distress may have internalized shame or fear about seeking support. This question helps identify breakdowns in communication or help-seeking patterns. It also opens a conversation about safe, reliable support.

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What sound or noise do you love?

This simple sensory-based question can reveal powerful regulation tools. Whether it's music, nature, or silence—it taps into auditory preferences that soothe the nervous system. Caregivers can incorporate these into routines.

When do you feel most like you?

Kids need protected spaces to be their authentic selves, especially in chaos. This question points to moments or environments where they feel aligned, free, or confident. It gives insight into identity and belonging.

What helps your heart feel full?

This opens up discussion around connection, joy, and emotional nourishment. Tough times can narrow emotional experiences—this broadens them. It also gives clues to activities or moments that restore the child's well-being.

What are you really good at that people don't always notice?

Many strengths go unseen, especially when a child is struggling behaviorally. This promotes pride and resilience. It helps see past the tough time behavior and connect with the whole child.

What should grownups say more often?

Children hear correction far more than encouragement in times of stress. This question invites feedback that can rewire communication patterns. It also empowers kids to shape their environment in emotionally healthy ways.