

#LookToLibraries

TOUGH CONVERSATIONS WITH KIDS

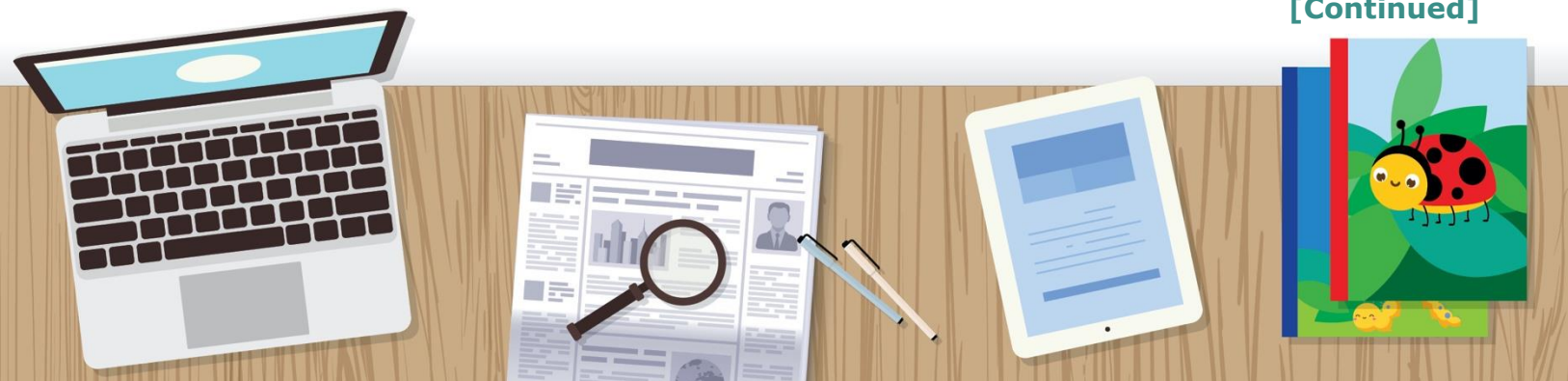
Look to a children's library professional for...

help talking with children about tough topics

The content for this tip sheet was originally published as a post called [Helping Kids Cope with Fear during a Pandemic](#) on the **ALSC Blog** by guest blogger, Chelsey Roos. Roos is a member of ALSC's Advocacy and Legislation committee and is currently a children's librarian at the Castro Valley Branch of the Alameda County Library in California. Roos references the strategies of Fred Rogers to describe how to talk with children about difficult topics.

- **Address the situation** - Mr. Rogers is an inspiring example of how to get down to a child's level and make the big, sometimes scary, realities of life understandable. Mr. Rogers was famous for saying, "**What is mentionable, is manageable,**" meaning that our overwhelming emotions like fear and grief can be understood by young children as long as we're willing to talk about them.
- **Keep language simple and clear** - Mr. Rogers is famous for tackling tough subjects. His programs addressed frightening, global issues. Two writers for *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*, Arthur Greenwald and Barry Head, coined the term "Freddish" to describe how Mr. Rogers talked about these tough topics. To speak "Freddish," you **carefully choose your language, using clear, positive instructions**, that can apply to all children when discussing a serious issue.
- **Provide positive options** - So how do we talk about the Coronavirus using Freddish? We choose unambiguous, simple phrases, and focus on the positive. This helps children stay in control of their actions. Instead of saying, "We can't play outside with our friends today," **we can empower kids to look to their caregivers for support** by saying, "Your favorite grown-ups can help you make a card to send to your friends to let them know you love them."

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RESOURCES:

King, Maxwell. 2020. "[Mister Rogers Had A Simple Set Of Rules For Talking To Children](https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/mr-rogers-neighborhood-talking-to-kids/562352/)". *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/mr-rogers-neighborhood-talking-to-kids/562352/>.

[ALSC Tough Topics Booklists](http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/book-lists/toughtopics2019) – Created in 2019, the books on these lists are to help inspire conversations with children going through challenging situations like the death of a loved one, an unexpected move, natural disasters and more. They are available for grades K-2nd, 3rd-5th and 6th-8th. Resources for adults are also included. <http://www.ala.org/alsc/publications-resources/book-lists/toughtopics2019>

