

# PARENT GUIDE

## TO ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

### WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Children today are growing up in an information age. With so many sources of information readily available (but not always accurate!) it can be overwhelming for young people to develop their own opinions. These simple tips are designed to help parents think about how best to support children in making sense of what's going on in the world around them.

Thinking about and making sense of current affairs, as well as sensitive and controversial issues, is a key part of children's education and development. Children are interested in understanding society and its changes, but they need support and guidance from trusted and respected adults in order to do so.



### KEY THEMES

When addressing a controversial or sensitive issue, consider the following steps:

- 1. Address the emotion - feelings first**
- 2. What do we know? What evidence is there?**
- 3. What do we want to do about it?**

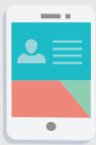
### THEME #1: EMOTION

Social and political issues often create strong feelings and emotions in our communities. We all have emotional reactions to sensitive social and political stories and the techniques the media use to report on these issues often serve to heighten these emotions. Children pick up on feelings of anger, anxiety or enthusiasm.



It can be useful to address these emotions and why we might feel this way before we start exploring the issues themselves. A good place to start when supporting children in this process is to get an understanding about how your child feels about a particular issue. Are they feeling confused, hopeful, anxious etc?

## THEME #2: EVIDENCE



When talking with your children it is important to start from where they are at in terms of knowledge and understanding. What do they know, think or understand about an issue? It is not important that as a parent you are an expert yourself (very few people are!) Instead, it is important to support children to think critically about the stories we see and hear. This could involve:

Looking up different viewpoints on any given issue

Checking the sources of information e.g. WWWDOT approach (see useful links section)

Encouraging your children to adopt a 'questioning' stance to information

Not always expecting to find the perfect answer. Some issues are too complicated for a simple conclusion



## THEME #3: EMPOWERMENT

We are often concerned or feel strongly about big issues in society, but we can also feel powerless and 'out-of-control'. As adults we can help children understand that we can make a difference to issues we care about. This could include considering the following questions:

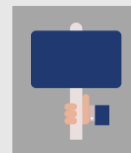
What is the issue?

What is being done to make a change?

Questions to think and talk about

Are there any responsible organisations who are working to make a difference?

Are there ways we can contribute?  
(emails, tweets, letters, petitions, volunteering etc.)



## ACCESSING SUPPORT

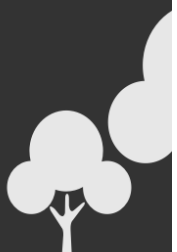
Hackney: James Wright  
Tower Hamlets: Thomas Llewellyn-Jones  
Waltham Forest: Sean Thomson



PRESENTED BY:

**WALTHAM FOREST,  
HACKNEY AND TOWER  
HAMLETS**

CONTACT THE RELEVANT COUNCIL TEAM FOR FURTHER SUPPORT AND INFORMATION.



# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE



## 1. Choose a news story:

This could be one that the young person is interested in, or one that you would like to discuss with them.

Ask them how they feel about the story - one way to do this is with Emotion cards like the ones below:

How does this make you feel?		
Happy	Excited	Bored
Confused	Angry	Tired
Anxious	Scared	Other



## 2. Research it together:

This could be from a source they have found or it could be one you have chosen (or even better, both!)

Consider these questions when looking at the sources:

- Who wrote the information? Are they reliable and what evidence do they have?
- When was it written? Is the information up to date?
- Why was it written? Is there an agenda? Is the author biased?
- Where else can you check the information?



## 3. Talk about it:

Share what you have found and discuss your reaction to it.

*Engaging in this process (and showing you are willing) is crucial*

Have either of you changed your views on the story? How? Why?

## USEFUL LINKS

The following sites can provide useful information and guidance for exploring sensitive issues and news stories:

@Snopes.com

@Fullfact.com

@BBC Newsround

@Simplepolitics.co.uk

Also consider exploring the 'WWWDOT approach to improving student's critical evaluation of websites'

