

Preparing for Conversation Guide

It can be helpful for you to reflect on how to prepare for and engage staff members in meaningful conversations with families. These conversations become even more important when there is conflict, disagreement, or tension between families. When you are concerned or nervous about a conversation, use this tool to help you plan ahead. Use the questions to help you think deeply with staff members about the problem and the roles of everyone in mind. You can use these questions to guide a discussion with staff members, or you can ask staff members to complete the questions in advance of a discussion.

Step 1: Start with the end in mind. Envision the perfect resolution to your problem.

- What do I really want for myself?

- What do I really want for the family?

- What do I really want for the program or classroom?

Step 2: Think about where you are right now.

- What is the problem?

- What roles have I put myself and the other person into in my mind? Is there a villain, a victim, etc.?

- How can I change my thinking about those roles?

Step 3: Look at the situation differently

- What could be motivating the other person? Do they have good intentions? Are they worried about their child's health, safety, or development?

- What is motivating me? Am I worried about saving face, looking bad, being embarrassed, or getting in trouble?

Step 4: Pull it together and make a plan. Once you've made a plan, talk it over to get additional ideas.

- How can I start the conversation in a way that shows I have really thought about the situation and care about the other person's viewpoint? Would any of these phrases help:
 - "I think we might be looking at a situation differently. Could we find a time to chat so I can understand where you are coming from?"
 - "I've been doing a lot of thinking, and I think what I said or did got us off to a bad start. Can I talk more with you about it?"

- What questions will you ask?

Step 5: Have the conversation and follow-up

- When is a good time for the conversation?

- How will I follow-up after the conversation?

- How will I know the conversation was successful?

References and resources:

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., Switzler, A., & Covey, S. R. (2011). Crucial Conversations: Crucial Conversation Planner. <http://cms.vitalsmarts.com/d/d/workspace/SpacesStore/e56b6a3c-2d6b-49ed-935c-ffe5bedac599/Crucial%20Conversations%20Planner.pdf?guest=true>

Ringer, J. (2006). We Have to Talk: A Step-by-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations. http://www.judyringer.com/pdf/free_articles/checklist.pdf