

Difficult Conversations with Families: Guiding Questions

Reflect on supportive versus unsupportive conversations with families. Consider the following questions as you watch the videos in the Learn section. Discuss your answers with a coach, trainer, or administrator.

Video 1: Difficult Conversations: What **Not** To Do

1. How does it seem like the staff member feels at different points in the conversation?

The staff member appears to be frustrated with the child's behavior, confrontational with the family member, judgmental of the family member, displays a negative attitude and is condescending at different times during the video. The staff members tone of voice and body language indicate that they are frustrated and overwhelmed by the child's behavior.

2. How does it seem like the family member feels at different points in the conversation?

The family member appears frustrated that they had to miss work, surprised that it is the first time they are hearing about their child's behaviors, defensive toward the staff member and dismissive of the resources provided.

3. In what ways is power held or shared in the conversation?

The staff member asserts power during this conversation. There is very little back and forth exchanges between the parent and the staff member and no reflective questioning used. The staff member starts the conversation with concerns, makes judgement on the family and then pushes resources on the family to use.

4. What evidence do you see that the relationship is damaged?

Both the staff member's and family member's emotions, attitude, body language and lack of eye contact indicate that the relationship is potentially damaged.

5. What could the staff member have done differently to make this a more comfortable conversation?

The staff member could have chosen a more appropriate time so that the conversation was not rushed, welcomed the family member in a positive way, started the conversation with something positive about the child before addressing concerns, used reflective questioning to seek the parents input in a non-judgmental way, and work collaboratively with the family to develop a plan that helps the child to be successful.

Video 2: Difficult Conversation: What To Do

1. How is this conversation different from the first video?

In this video, there is more of a back and forth dialogue between the staff member and the family member. The staff member has a positive attitude and friendly demeanor. They smile and show appreciation toward the family member. The staff member begins the conversations with the child's strengths and points out that they can work together to best support the child. The staff member provides the family member with observations of the child's behavior and asks the family member to share what they are observing at home. The family member is more open and accepting to the conversation and willing to share information about the child's home life. The staff member uses reflective questioning, asks for suggestions and works with the family member to decide on supports that might help the child to be successful.

2. What evidence do you see of a healthy and trusting relationship?

Friendly, positive attitude and genuine appreciation toward one another. The staff member shows respect in their comments and questions regarding the child and family. The family member shows an openness to the interaction and conversation.

3. What strategies did the staff member use to help the family member feel comfortable and valued?

The staff member was welcoming in her demeanor using friendly verbal and non-verbal cues. Before expressing any concerns about the child, the staff member shares the child's strengths and why he is a valuable member of the program. The staff member shows an appreciation toward the family member for making time to meet.

4. What can you learn from this conversation and apply to your own work with families?

Answers will vary