

Difficult Conversations

Developing a positive relationship with parents is an important part of providing the best care for their child. If a trusting relationship has already been established, difficult conversations have a better chance of a positive outcome. Because of competing priorities, program policies, differences in approach, etc., the need for a difficult conversation between a caregiver and a parent is not uncommon. Here are some key steps to consider when talking with parents.

1. **Notice how you are feeling.** Approach the conversation with understanding. If you are irritated or frustrated, that emotion will emerge through tone and body language even if your words are respectful.
2. **Ask thoughtful questions.** This honors parents' knowledge of their child and demonstrates respect.
3. **Listen carefully** to what the family member is saying **and clarify what you heard.** Notice body language and facial expressions, which can help you understand the meaning behind their words.
4. **Express your understanding and acceptance** of the family member's experiences and feelings whether you agree with them or not.
5. **Jointly problem-solve.** Develop a plan with parents to address the situation. Ask for the parent's perspective and look for a place to compromise.
6. **Check in with parents** to see how things are going. Communication is the foundation of creating a trusting relationship.
7. **Acknowledge** that being a parent is hard work and that you are a team, each wanting what is best for the child. Remember that parents are doing the best job they can, just as you are.

Adapted from Whiteman, Jodi. (2013) *Connecting with Families: Tips for Those Difficult Conversations*. Rocking and Rolling: Supporting Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families. Young Children. March 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.naeyc.org/yc/>