



BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

AUGUST 2023: RECOGNIZING WHEN THE CONVERSATION ISN'T GOING WELL

The safety of the environment may shift when a person becomes uncomfortable because of the topic, or the emotions associated with the topic. Child Welfare Professionals may inadvertently cause the conversation to be off balance with something that is said. It's the role of the CW Professional to recognize when the environment has become unsafe to productively continue the discussion and make efforts to put it back on track.

FOUR COMMUNICATION BEHAVIORS THAT DERAIL CONVERSATIONS

1

Blame: Painting them/yourself as a victim. Pointing the finger at someone else. Minimizing or invalidating the seriousness of the situation.

- Statements such as "Oh come on, it's not that bad", "It's not my fault", or "Nobody understands".

2

Contempt: Occurs when there's a feeling of superiority and actions to make the other person feel inferior. Deep down this usually stems from feeling unappreciated and unacknowledged.

- Verbal signs: Sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, mockery.
- Non-Verbal Body Language: Tightening of body, stiff or immobile, tense/raised shoulders, crossing arms over chest, touching neck, or fidgeting with clothes, avoiding eye contact in disgust, or eye rolling.

3

Defensiveness: Justifying rather than accepting. Bringing up the past in attempts to not focus on the present. Also includes making excuses or getting to the point of no longer listening.

- Change in tone; glancing at clocks, watches, or paying attention to the phone; dropping eyes to the ground or a glazed-over stare, dramatic shortening of responses such as "Yes, I got it" multiple "OKs", or "Yeah, sure, whatever".

4

Stonewalling: This includes passivity, avoiding certain topics, refusal to participate in or contribute to the discussion or withholding relevant information.



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TIPS WHEN NOTICING THE SHIFT

Refrain - Avoid panicking or getting angry. Be understanding rather than take it personally as sometimes people get the point, they just don't feel like talking any longer.

Reframe - Cast the issue in a different light.

Rephrase - Use their words in a different way.

Redirect - Make attempts to change the direction of conversation or topics.

Request - Ask the person to explain the intent or the feeling.

Rebalance - Stay calm and rebalance power to get back to mutual sharing.

Reorganize - Break down small, reasonable steps towards the common goal.

Reschedule - Even when the conversation is going well, a person's brain can only handle so much information.



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REFLECTION ON CONTENT

Think about a time you felt uncomfortable in a conversation. What words or actions might you have displayed that would indicate you no longer wanted to engage with that person?

ACTION ITEM

During a challenging conversation, look for signs that you or the other person are feeling or displaying one of the derailing behaviors. Use one, or more, of the "R"s to attempt to put the discussion back on track.