



BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

JUNE 2023: KNOWING YOURSELF: APPROACHING A CRUCIAL CONVERSATION

Components of a Challenging Conversation

HIGH STAKES - DIFFERING VIEWS - STRONG EMOTIONS

When conversations get tough and it's beginning to feel like an unsafe conversation, you may start down one of two unhealthy paths:
Silence or Violence.

Silence Patterns: Purposefully withholding information to avoid potential problems. The three most common forms of silence are masking, avoiding, and withdrawing.

MASKING

Consists of understating or selectively showing our true opinions. Sarcasm, sugarcoating, and couching (meaning to camouflage the true meaning) are some of the more popular forms.

AVOIDING

Involves steering completely away from sensitive subjects. We talk, but without addressing the real issues.

WITHDRAWING

Means pulling out of a conversation altogether. We either exit the conversation or exit the room.



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Violence Patterns: Violence patterns consist of any verbal strategy that attempts to convince, control, or compel others to your point of view. The three most common forms are **controlling, labeling, and attacking**.

CONTROLLING

Consists of coercing others to your way of thinking. It's done through either forcing your views on others or dominating the conversation. Methods include cutting others off, overstating facts, speaking in absolutes, changing subjects, or using directive questions to control the conversation.

LABELING

Is putting a label on people or ideas so we can dismiss them under a general stereotype or category.

ATTACKING

You've moved from winning the argument to making the person suffer. Tactics include belittling and threatening.



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SOLUTIONS: HOW TO SWITCH OFF OUR TENDENCY TO GO TOWARDS SILENCE OR VIOLENCE

Get your motives right. When we worry our motives become short-termed, such as winning the conversation or avoiding conflict. Reset to longer-term motives by thoughtfully answering: **What do I really want for myself in this conversation? For the other person? For the relationship to progress? For other stakeholders in the family's success?**

Get your emotions right. Unhelpful emotions associated with hypothesizing the person as a victim or villain is a barrier to a productive conversation. Recognize the challenges associated with starting your conversation with a particular hypothesis. It's not necessarily harmful to have a hypothesis but they are meant to be tested and potentially proven wrong.

Gather the facts. Share your current conclusion. Share what led you to your conclusion by laying out the relevant and sufficient information. Most importantly, allow this thinking to be challenged while remaining open to new pieces of information. This requires the Child Welfare Professional to be patient, honest, and vulnerable.

Get curious. The most important attitude in a challenging conversation is a blend of confidence and curiosity. Consider how you will present your position in a thorough way and confident way for it to have merit. Muster enough humility to be interested in any facts or logic that might improve your conclusion or change it altogether.



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REFLECTION ON CONTENT

Think back to a challenging conversation. Which route did you feel yourself going - toward silence or violence? Do you identify with any of the common forms of these defense mechanisms?

ACTION ITEM

Before approaching a challenging conversation think about what you are likely to experience. Review the solutions to see which is the most meaningful for you at that time to consider in that partnership.