



BUILDING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

NOVEMBER 2023 WATCH YOUR WORDS: WHAT YOU SAY VS WHAT THEY HEAR

What you say isn't as important as what they are hearing. There can be mixed signals and feelings during exchanges because people hear what you say from their own reference point, values, and experiences. It may also be that people don't care about what you say, and won't listen, until they know you care about them.

Processing language takes a fair amount of internal work and thought. As you speak, you encode your language to have an effect while the other person is decoding what is being said and trying to convert it to memory. In the world of Child Protective Services where there are acronyms and complicated practices and procedures, being a good communicator is a huge responsibility in maintaining effective partnerships.

External factors in the environment can shape the conversation as well. If your body language doesn't match your words, if there are children present, distracting noises, or a competing appointment needing attention, words may not land in the way you expected.





NOVEMBER 2023 WATCH YOUR WORDS: WHAT YOU SAY VS WHAT THEY HEAR

Solutions to Avoid Disconnect

Brevity (or being brief and concise) is key.

Use short sentences and only the number of words necessary. CPS Professionals may have a lot to explain but think about information in sections and take frequent breaks to ensure understanding. Avoid going overboard with any explanation that can overwhelm the listener. When we feel uncomfortable, we are more likely to fill space with extra words.

Credibility is as important as the philosophy.

Your words must come from a place of sincerity. If they appear deceitful or phony, contradict what the listener believes to be the facts, or contradicts their perceptions, they will lack impact. When the CPS Professional is talking about very serious topics, or when the mood is dark and there are attempts to lighten it, if credibility hasn't been achieved, you may evoke other feelings than what you're looking for (anger rather than understanding). Speak with clarity and transparency. Say what you mean and mean what you say.

Consistency matters.

Message consistency builds trust and clarity. The best communicators find the easiest way to explain things. When you develop a phrase that works, you say it repeatedly. Consistency is not just about the words you say but how they are delivered is equally important.

Speak from an aspirational place.

Language that brings about action is the best kind. Scientific studies reveal using either negative or positive words will have an impact on the outcome. When someone hears words making them feel criticized, rejected, or fearful, the body produces higher levels of cortisol that shuts down the thinking center of the brain and activates conflict aversion and protective behaviors. Aspirational language can trigger emotional remembrance. If the listener can apply that language to a situation or human condition in their life, you've achieved humanization. This means they feel recognized, valued and experience a sense of dignity as an individual person.



NOVEMBER 2023 WATCH YOUR WORDS: WHAT YOU SAY VS WHAT THEY HEAR

Reflection on Content

Think about a recent conversation that did not go as you hoped, or evoked a feeling you were not expecting. Was there potentially an external or internal factor that prompted this?

Action Item

Prepare for an interaction in which important information will be shared and consider the words and phrases you intend to use. Make sure there are no acronyms or jargon that can make the listener feel unintelligent or irrelevant. Plan for how you share information in logical sections and take breaks to seek understanding.