

GUIDE

MORE THAN WORDS: NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

A resource to help early childhood educators navigate difficult conversations with clarity, care, and confidence

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THE COURAGE TO CONNECT



In early childhood education, the **relationships we build—with children, families, and each other—are at the heart of everything we do**. But even in the most positive relationships, there will be moments that feel hard. Some conversations are simply difficult to start. Others stir up personal emotions or touch on deeply sensitive topics.

Maybe you're concerned about a child's safety. Maybe a parent shares something that reminds you of your own past. Maybe you're not sure how to talk with a co-worker about something uncomfortable.

This guide is here to help. With support and preparation, you can approach these conversations with **calm, curiosity, and care**. You don't have to have all the answers. You just have to show up with compassion and a willingness to listen.

What's in here

- Understanding Challenging Conversations
- Six Steps to Preparing for a Hard Conversation
- During the Conversation: Key Strategies
- After the Conversation: Reflection & Follow-Up
- Deep Dive Topics for Directors, Teachers, and In-Home Providers

NAVIGATING SENSITIVE TOPICS

What makes a conversation challenging?

It depends. For one staff member, food insecurity may be a tough topic. For another, it might be sharing feelings of overwhelm with a peer. There's no single definition—and that's okay. What matters is recognizing when you need extra time, support, or reflection before a conversation.

Common challenging topics include:

- Concerns about child safety, development, or behavior
- Housing or food insecurity
- Mental health issues
- Policy violations or issues related to professionalism
- Differences in cultural understanding or values
- Domestic violence or intimate partner violence
- Substance use
- Uneven workload or unclear roles

These topics are deeply personal. They often carry stigma or trauma, and they may bring up our own lived experiences. It's normal for these conversations to feel heavy. **But they also create space for deeper connection and empathy.**



Something bigger

Difficult conversations aren't just problems to solve—they're opportunities to build trust, strengthen relationships, and model the kind of communication we want to see in our students, families, and teams.

TIPS AND TRICKS

A few reminders to help you lead difficult conversations with calm, clarity, and care.



Lead with Purpose: A supportive purpose leads to a supportive tone. If your goal is connection, not control, it'll show. Your attitude matters. Believe it can go well.

See the Bigger Story: Imagine the conversation as a story you're both part of. What chapter is this for them? What role are you playing—helper, listener, teammate? Seeing the moment as part of a bigger journey can soften urgency, spark compassion, and remind you that you're co-authoring something, not delivering a verdict.

Create a Centering Ritual: Before difficult conversations, take a few deep breaths, pause with a comforting object, or do a brief mindfulness exercise. Entering the space grounded and intentional sets the tone before a single word is said.

Listen Longer: When in doubt, listen longer. Silence can be powerful—it gives others space to share and helps you respond with care instead of reaction.

Balance Care and Clarity: Keep compassion and accountability side by side. You can be kind and still be clear. People feel safest when they know what to expect.

SIX STEPS TO PREPARING FOR A CHALLENGING CONVERSATION

Before beginning any hard conversation with a family member, co-worker, or peer, these six steps can help you approach it with clarity, confidence, and care.



1. REFLECT ON YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND EXPERIENCES

Before talking with someone else, take time to check in with yourself. Ask:

- What thoughts or emotions does this topic bring up for me?
- What personal experiences are influencing how I feel?
- What assumptions am I making?
- What strengths—mine or theirs—can guide this conversation?

Reflection helps you stay grounded. You might do this on your own, or with someone you trust—a supervisor, mentor, or peer.



2. GET CLEAR ON WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW OR SHARE

Think through the practical pieces:

- What is my purpose? Why do I want to have this conversation?
- What specifically do I want to talk about? What questions do I have?
- What do I hope will happen? What outcomes am I prepared for?
- What resources or referrals can I share? Is there someone who should join the conversation for support?

The clearer you are on your purpose, the more productive and respectful the conversation will be.



3. CONSIDER THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE

Empathy is key. Before you begin, ask yourself:

- How might this topic feel to them?
- What emotions might they be carrying—fear, shame, confusion, anger?
- What are their blind spots? Could they be just as unsure as you?
- What cultural or personal values might shape how they see the issue?
- What misunderstandings might need to be addressed gently?

You don't need to guess perfectly—just begin with curiosity and openness.



4. PREPARE THEM FOR THE CONVERSATION

If possible, let the person know what to expect. This can reduce anxiety and build trust. Let them know the topic ahead of time, when possible. Also ask:

- Would it help to have someone else present?
- Is there a need for an interpreter?
- Is there anyone they wouldn't want there?
- How would they prefer to receive feedback?
- Would they rather talk now or set up a future time?



5. SET THE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Your setting matters—choose a space that feels private, calm, and welcoming, and allows either person to leave if needed.

Offer something simple to ease tension—a glass of water, tea, or a light snack. If you're meeting in their home, ask where they'd prefer to sit. If safety is a concern, make sure you have an exit and nearby support.

Start with warmth and clarity: "Thank you for sitting down with me. I care about you/your family and want to make sure we talk through this in a way that feels safe and respectful."



6. PRACTICE WITH SOMEONE YOU TRUST

You don't have to go in cold. Try a role-play with someone:

- Script out key points. Practice your tone.
- Take turns playing both roles.
- Pause to reflect: What felt hard? What helped?
- Focus on learning and perspective-taking, not perfection.

It's okay if it feels awkward—these conversations take practice. Mistakes are opportunities for growth.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Here are a few tried-and-true openers:

- "I have something I'd like to talk through together. Is now a good time?"
- "I want to better understand your perspective on something that's come up."
- "We've had a few moments recently that I think we could learn from together."
- "I value working with you, and I'd love to clear something up so we can keep moving forward."
- "I wanted to check in about what happened today."
- "I've noticed [specific behavior], and I'd like to talk about what's going on and how I can support you."
- "This may be difficult to talk about. I want to approach it with care and support."
- "We're on the same team. Let's figure out what next steps feel right for both of us."
- "I've been struggling with [situation] and could use some guidance or resources."



Pro tip: Write down your opening line before the conversation. Practicing helps. Think of it like muscle memory. The more you prepare, the more confident and calm you'll be.

DURING THE CONVERSATION: KEY STRATEGIES

STAY REGULATED

You may feel emotional, nervous, or afraid. That's normal. Take a breath, pause if needed.

Avoid minimizing their emotions, rushing to problem-solve before validating, or sharing too much of your own story unless they ask.

STAY FOCUSED ON THEM

Even if you've had a similar experience, their story is uniquely theirs.

- Instead of: "I know exactly how you feel."
- Try: "I'm here with you. I care about what this is like for you."

Stay curious. Ask questions. Listen fully, without jumping to respond. You'll get your turn—just not yet. Try saying:

- "Can you tell me more about how you see it?"
- "What's important to you in this situation?"

SHOW EMPATHY

Empathy doesn't mean agreeing—it means seeing someone as human. It can be your superpower in touch moments.

Here's how to practice empathy:

- Put yourself in their shoes: What might they be experiencing?
- Listen for the emotion beneath the words.
- Avoid judgment.
- Ask open-ended questions:
 - "What's your take on this?"
 - "Help me understand what's most important to you here."
- Empathy helps conversations move from conflict to connection.



ACKNOWLEDGE

Let them know you hear them. Not agreement—acknowledgment.

- "It sounds like this really matters to you."
- "I can understand how you'd feel that way."

You can also acknowledge yourself:

- "I notice I'm feeling defensive right now, and I want to stay open."



ADVOCATE

Now share your perspective. Be honest, clear, and kind.

Try saying something like:

- "Here's how I've been seeing it..."
- "What I'd love to see happen is..."

You're not erasing their truth—you're adding yours to the table.



PROBLEM-SOLVE

Now you're ready to collaborate. Brainstorm. Try things. Build together.

- "What do you think would work?"
- "Let's find something that supports both of us."

If things heat up, go back to acknowledging and inquiring.



CONTROL, CONFIDENCE, AND CONNECTION

- Say it with control: Stay grounded. Avoid reacting in the heat of the moment.
- Say it with confidence: Set clear boundaries and speak honestly.
- Say it to connect: Aim for understanding, not winning.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION: FOLLOW UP

Following up after a hard conversation shows that you care—and that you mean what you say. It helps build trust, clarity, and connection.

Reflect

Talk it over with someone you trust. What went well? What could you do differently next time? Do you need to debrief or release anything emotionally?

Make a plan

If a next step was discussed, follow through:

- Did you offer a referral? Check in to see how it went.
- Did you promise another conversation? Schedule it.
- Did a repair need to happen? Own it with care.

Follow up in writing, outline expectations, and be consistent in support and follow-through.

Take care of yourself

Hard conversations can linger. Take time to care for your own heart. You deserve the same care and compassion you give to others.



Pro tip: A small, heartfelt gesture can go a long way—leave a kind note, send a quick message of appreciation, or share a resource that shows you're still thinking of them. Thoughtful follow-up isn't just about logistics—it's about keeping the connection strong.

WHAT TO DO WHEN IT'S REALLY HARD

Some conversations shake us—especially when they involve:

- Reporting suspected abuse or neglect
- Ending a staff or family relationship
- Addressing racism, bias, or discrimination
- Systemic issues beyond your control (like funding or staffing)

Give yourself permission to pause. You might say:

- "This is important, and I want to be sure we can talk about it with care. Would it be okay if we took a short break and came back to it?"
- "This is hard, and I care enough to stay in it."
- "I don't have all the answers, but I want to understand."
- Let these words be your compass—they're enough.

When it's hard, remember:

- You can't fix everything. Act with care and integrity.
- Clarity is kindness. People need to understand what's happening and why.
- You deserve support, too. Lean on peers, mentors, or mental health resources.

Take time for yourself—step outside, journal, connect with someone you trust, or simply breathe. You are a caregiver, and you also deserve care.

TIPS FOR:
**EARLY CHILDHOOD
CENTER DIRECTORS**



FOR: EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER DIRECTORS

As a director, you are the steady anchor of your program—supporting staff, guiding families, and creating a safe, nurturing environment for children. You wear many hats: leader, coach, listener, and sometimes, bearer of hard news.

That also means you're often the one navigating the most challenging conversations—about performance, professionalism, safety, or personal struggles. It's not easy, but you're not alone.

This section offers practical tools and compassionate strategies to help you lead with clarity, empathy, and integrity, even when the conversation is tough.



You may need to talk with staff about:

- Performance or professionalism concerns
- Policy violations or safety issues
- Burnout, stress, or personal challenges
- Conflicts between coworkers
- Communication breakdowns with families

These conversations can stir strong emotions—for your team and for you.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH TEACHERS & STAFF

As a leader, your words carry weight. Approach tough conversations with clarity, care, and respect so feedback feels like an invitation to grow, not something to fear.

1. Reflect before you respond

- Get clear on your role and purpose: Are you aiming to support growth, protect children, uphold standards—or a mix of all three?
- Take a moment to ask: What am I seeing? What's the impact? What might be contributing to this? Consider things like stress, lack of training, or unclear expectations.

2. Get specific and stay grounded

- Identify the patterns or behaviors that need to be addressed—focus on facts, not feelings.
- Think ahead about what kind of support might help: Is this a coaching moment? A training need? A reset of expectations?

3. Use language that invites, not confronts

- Speak with clarity, curiosity, and care. You're not delivering a verdict—you're opening a door. Compassion and accountability can coexist.
- **Try:** "I've noticed you've been late several times this month, and I'm concerned about how that's affecting the classroom and your stress levels. Can we talk about what's been going on and how we can work on a plan together?"
- **Instead of:** "You've been late a lot, and it's affecting the classroom."

4. Stay focused on partnership and growth

- Ask thoughtful questions that help the other person reflect and share their perspective.
- **Try:** "I saw the way you responded when [child's name] was struggling during circle time. I'd love to understand your thinking in that moment and explore some other strategies that might support both of you."
- **Instead of:** "You need to change how you're handling behavior."

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH FAMILIES

When families come to you—or when you bring something difficult to them—it's a chance to model compassionate leadership, strengthen trust, and remind them they're not alone.

1. Lead with listening

- Whether the issue comes to you directly or is escalated from a teacher, begin by creating space for the family to share. Many concerns are rooted in fear, frustration, or miscommunication.
- Show empathy: "I can hear that this has been really upsetting. I appreciate you bringing it to us."

2. Reaffirm partnership

- Remind families that you're on the same team:
- "We're here to support your child and your family. Let's work together to find a way forward."
- Even when the topic is serious—like safety, policy, or conflict—your tone can be calm, clear, and collaborative.

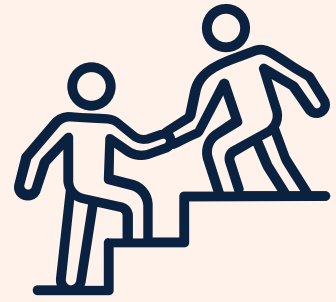
3. Be honest, direct, and solution-focused

- Be transparent about what's happening, and clear about what's possible.
- Offer next steps without overpromising: "Here's what we can do right now, and here's what we're still working on."

4. Set the tone with thoughtful language

- Prepare families gently for sensitive conversations:
 - "I wanted to check in about something that's come up with [child's name]. It's sensitive, and I'd like to talk it through with care. Would now be a good time?"
- Use inclusive, non-blaming language:
 - "We've noticed [specific behavior/situation] and want to understand what you're seeing at home and how we can support your child together."

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR DIRECTORS



Being a director means holding space for everyone else. But you need space, too.

- Schedule reflection time after hard conversations
- Debrief with your leadership team or a mentor
- Keep a “grounding script” handy—something you can return to when emotions run high
- Practice mindful self-compassion: “This is hard. I’m doing my best. I can handle this.”

Being a center director is one of the most complex—and powerful—roles in early childhood education.

You hold space for so many.
You support growth in big and small ways.
You carry both structure and heart.

Difficult conversations are part of that leadership—but they don’t define it. Your **empathy**, your **clarity**, and your **commitment** to doing right by your team and families? That’s leadership.

And remember:
You can’t always make it easy, but you can make it **kind**. You can make it **clear**. You can make it **human**.

TIPS FOR:
EARLY CHILDHOOD
TEACHERS & STAFF



FOR: EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

As a teacher in an early childhood program, you're in the heart of it all—building relationships, responding to children's needs, supporting families, and collaborating with your team. You spend your days listening, guiding, modeling, and caring.

But even in the most nurturing spaces, tough conversations happen.

Maybe you need to share a concern with a parent. Maybe a co-teacher's approach doesn't feel right. Maybe something a supervisor said rubbed you the wrong way.

These conversations can feel uncomfortable, emotional, or even scary— especially if you don't want to "cause drama." But holding things in often makes it worse. These are opportunities to build deeper understanding, solve problems, and strengthen your relationships.

This section offers tools and language to help you approach hard conversations with confidence, curiosity, and compassion—because how we talk with people matters just as much as what we say.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH COLLEAGUES

Working side by side with someone every day takes trust—and when something isn't working, it can create tension quickly.

1. Start from partnership

- Remind each other that you're on the same team—with shared goals for the children and each other.
- "I really value working with you, and I want us to be able to talk about anything that's getting in the way of our team feeling strong."
- Try starting with appreciation: "I really admire how you ____."

2. Use "I" statements

- Speak from your own experience without making assumptions: "I feel..." instead of "You always..."
- "I've been feeling a little overwhelmed when the transition to nap time falls mostly on me. Can we talk about how we're dividing things?"

3. Be curious, not accusing

- Ask open-ended questions to invite conversation, not defensiveness: "Can you walk me through what you were thinking when..."
- Remember that everyone brings their own background, training, and style—curiosity helps bridge the gap.

4. Be kind and direct

- Clear is kind—avoid hinting or hoping they'll "get it." Being honest and respectful is a gift.
- "I know this might be a hard conversation. I want you to know it's coming from a place of respect."
- Acknowledge the awkwardness if it's there—it helps normalize these conversations and takes the pressure off.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH FAMILIES

Teachers are often the first to notice changes in a child's behavior or emotions. These conversations can feel personal, and it's natural to worry about saying the wrong thing or hurting feelings.

1. Begin with connection and care

- Lead with warmth—a smile, a kind tone, or a quick check-in about their day goes a long way in setting the tone.
- Let families know they're seen: "I know mornings can be a lot. Thanks for taking time to chat."
- What feels hard now can become the start of a stronger partnership.

2. Share observations, not judgements

- Stick to what you've seen or heard, not what you think it means: "We noticed [specific behavior]..."
- Keep language neutral and descriptive: avoid words like "bad," "aggressive," or "disruptive" in favor of gentle, specific observations.

3. Focus on the child's well-being

- Use "we" language to reinforce shared care: "We both care so much about [child's name] feeling safe and successful."
- Highlight strengths too—this helps keep the conversation balanced and hopeful.
- Families care deeply—even if they show it differently than you expect.

4. Ask before advising

- Respect their expertise and role: "Would it be okay if I shared what's been working here?"
- Offer ideas as options, not directives: "One thing we've tried is... but every child is different—what do you think might work for your family?"
- Remind them that challenges are part of learning and growing—it's not a reflection of their parenting.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH LEADERSHIP

It can feel vulnerable to speak up, especially if you're new or unsure how it will be received. But leaders want to know what's really going on—and they can't help if no one tells them.

1. Name your intent

- Starting with your why helps set a collaborative tone: "I care about our team and the children, and that's why I wanted to bring this up."
- Clarify that you're not trying to complain—you're seeking solutions and support.

2. Focus on shared goals

- Frame your concern within the bigger picture: "I know we're all working toward a calm, consistent environment for the kids—here's something that's been getting in the way for me."
- Use language that reinforces partnership, not opposition.

3. Be specific

- Describe what's happening, when, and how it affects you or the children—clear details make it easier to find a path forward.
- Try: "During morning drop-off, I've noticed it's hard to connect with families when I'm also managing set-up solo. Could we look at coverage during that window?"

4. Ask for invite

- Show that you're open to ideas and willing to be part of the solution: "I'd love to hear how you're seeing it from your side."
- This builds mutual respect and can lead to creative, collaborative problem-solving.

SIMPLE WAYS TO STEP AWAY

Caring for others starts with caring for yourself. Taking a moment when you're overwhelmed isn't selfish—it's a healthy, professional way to reset so you can return with presence and care.

We serve others best when we care for ourselves, too.

Ways to ask for a break:

- "I'm feeling off-center. Could I step out for a few minutes to regroup?"
- "Would you mind covering for a moment? I need a quick breather to come back grounded."
- "I want to show up well for the kids, and I need a short pause. Is now a good time to take five?"
- "I'm feeling overwhelmed—can we tag-team for a bit while I take a few deep breaths?"
- "I care about how I show up, and I need a moment to collect myself. Can someone step in for a few minutes?"



Pro tip: Build a plan with your team ahead of time. Talk about what to do when someone needs a quick breather, so no one has to over-explain in the moment. When it's normalized, it's easier to ask—and easier to say yes.

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR TEACHERS



Tough conversations can feel scary—but they're also where growth happens.

Whether you're supporting a family through a hard time, speaking up for yourself, or navigating team dynamics, your voice matters. And when you speak with **honesty, empathy, and clarity**, you're doing the very thing you ask of children: Communicate with care.

You don't have to be perfect—you just have to be present, thoughtful, and kind.

Each conversation is a chance to build trust, deepen relationships, and strengthen your work.

Yes, it's hard.
Yes, it might be messy.
Yes, it might not go perfectly.
But you are here. You are trying.

And that makes all the difference.

You've got this.

TIPS FOR:
IN-HOME
DAYCARE PROVIDERS



FOR: IN-HOME PROVIDERS

As an in-home childcare provider, your care goes beyond curriculum and routines. **You open your home**—and your heart—to the children and families you serve. Because you work in your own living room, kitchen, or backyard, difficult conversations can sometimes happen in the same spaces where you share family moments.

Your relationships are deep and personal—that's the magic of home-based care. It's also what can make some conversations especially hard.

Whether you're talking with a parent about a sensitive concern or navigating a tricky moment with a co-provider, you're not alone.

Protect your emotional boundaries and set clear expectations for when and how these conversations happen. **Here's some guidance just for you.**

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH CO-PROVIDERS OR ASSISTANTS

Working in close quarters with another adult—especially in your own home—can bring its own set of challenges.

1. Start from shared values

- Remind them of your partnership: "We're both here because we care deeply about these kids."
- Use a calm tone to invite conversation, not confrontation: "Let's figure out a way that feels good for both of us and supports the children."

2. Use "I" language

- Keep the focus on your experience: "I noticed I was feeling unsure during pickup yesterday—I'd love to talk about it together."
- Avoid blaming language; instead, be real and respectful: "I've been feeling a bit out of sync during mealtimes. Can we check in on how we're handling those moments?"

3. Make space for their perspective

- Show genuine curiosity: "How has that been feeling for you lately?"
- "I want to understand how it felt for you, too."
- Allow for silence or pause—some people need a little time to open up. A simple "I'm listening" can go a long way.

4. When support is needed

- If a co-provider isn't following safety protocols or something doesn't feel right, don't wait to bring it up. Trust your professional judgment, and seek outside support from your licensing agency, network coach, or trusted mentor if needed.

TIPS FOR TALKING WITH FAMILIES

Talking with families about tough topics can feel tender—especially when your home is also your workplace. With care, curiosity, and clear boundaries, you can navigate these moments with compassion and confidence.

1. Start with care, not conclusions

- Trust your instincts when something feels off—but take a breath and reflect before jumping in.
- Lead with curiosity, not assumptions: "I've noticed that [child's name] has seemed more quiet lately. Have you noticed anything at home?"

2. Focus on partnership, not fixing

- Avoid judgment, especially when challenges may be tied to complex issues like housing, family stress, or substance use.
- Remind families they are the experts on their child: "You know your child best, and I want to support you in whatever way I can."

3. Set healthy boundaries with warmth

- It's okay to set limits around things like after-hours texts or personal requests.
- You can be both kind and clear: "I care deeply about our work together, and I also want to make sure I'm taking care of myself so I can be fully present for the kids each day..."

4. Create space for private conversations

- If a moment isn't right (especially in your home), it's okay to pause and find a better setting.
- Try: "I'd like to give this the time and space it deserves—would it be okay if we talked outside or scheduled a time to chat by phone this evening?"

FINAL THOUGHTS FOR IN-HOME PROVIDERS



In-home care is personal, relational, and incredibly powerful. The families you work with may feel more like extended family than clients. That closeness is a gift—and it also means **boundaries, communication, and self-care** are more important than ever.

When you approach hard conversations with warmth, clarity, and care, you're not just addressing a problem—you're modeling healthy, respectful communication for children and families alike.

And remember:

You don't have to do this alone. Reach out to your local family childcare network, licensing specialist, or professional development coach. Build a circle of support around yourself, just like you do for the children in your care.

You are doing sacred work—in your own space, with your whole heart. Even the hardest conversations can deepen trust and partnership when handled with care. You're not expected to be perfect. You're expected to keep trying, to stay open, and to care. That's more than enough.

Important Reminders

As you move forward, keep these final reminders in your pocket. Difficult conversations aren't about getting it perfect—they're about showing up with care, staying grounded, and choosing connection, even when it's hard.

➤ **Tough talks build trust**

They build trust, open doors, and deepen connection.

➤ **You can care deeply and still set boundaries.**

You can be warm and still be clear. You can be kind and still hold people accountable.

➤ **Your own feelings matter too.**

Whether you feel anxious, activated, or unsure, your emotions are information—not weakness.

➤ **You don't have to go it alone.**

Reach out. Reflect with a peer. Debrief with a supervisor. Take care of your own heart so you can continue to care for others.

➤ **Amazing things happen when you lean in.**

When we face hard conversations with compassion and courage, powerful things can happen:

- A family feels seen.
- A child gets the support they need.
- A colleague feels safe to grow.
- A conflict finds a pathway to resolution.
- A program culture becomes more open, honest, and strong.
- You grow—not just as a professional, but as a human.

MORE THAN WORDS

If you've read this guide, it likely means you care—a lot.

You **care** about the children you work with.

You **care** about the families you partner with.

You **care** about your coworkers, your community, your team.

You **care** about doing things the right way—especially when it's hard.

And that's the thing about difficult conversations:

They are hard **because** they matter.

They are uncomfortable **because** you're brave enough to step in, instead of stepping away.

They are vulnerable **because** they involve real people, with real lives, real struggles, and real stories.

Whether you're a teacher, a director, a coach, or a provider working out of your home—navigating challenging topics is never just about finding the right words. It's about showing up with your whole heart. It's about honoring your role, while respecting theirs. It's about **making space for connection**, even when things are tender, tense, or uncertain.



Take a breath.

Remember who you are.

Remember who you're doing this for.

And when you're ready... lean in.

Because the hardest conversations are often the ones that change everything.

Activity Printables



PREPARATION ACTIVITY #1

DATE:



→ What thoughts or emotions does this topic bring up for me?

→ What personal experiences are influencing how I feel?

→ What assumptions am I making? Am I assuming this person meant to hurt me, ignore me, or dismiss me?

→ Can I identify any strengths—mine or theirs—that can guide this conversation?

PREPARATION ACTIVITY #2

DATE:



What is my purpose? Why do I want to have this conversation?

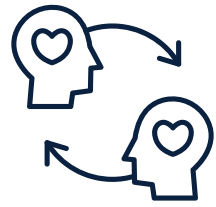
What specifically do I want to talk about? What questions do I have?

What do I hope will happen? What outcomes am I prepared for?

What resources or referrals could I share? Is there someone who should join the conversation for support?

PREPARATION ACTIVITY #3

DATE:



How might this topic feel to the person I'm having the conversation with?

What emotions might they be carrying? What are their blind spots?

Are there cultural or personal values that might shape how they see the issue?

What misunderstandings might need to be addressed gently?

PREPARATION ACTIVITY #4

DATE:



→ Would it help to have someone else present? If so, who?

→ Is there anyone they wouldn't want there?

→ How they would prefer to receive feedback?

→ Is there a need for an interpreter?

PREPARING WITH INTENTION...

Use the space below to reflect, plan, or simply get your thoughts out on paper—there's no right or wrong way to prepare.

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MY KEY POINTS



REFLECTION JOURNAL

Use this page after a tough conversation to pause, reflect, and plan next steps. Note what went well, what was hard, and what you'll do next. Use this space to follow up with care and consistency.



1. What went well?

2. What could I do differently next time?

3. What referrals or resources do I need to follow up on?

4. Will we have another conversation? If so, when?

5. What steps will I take to follow up and keep the connection strong?

6. How will I take care of myself? Who can I debrief with or ask for support?

COLLABORATION

BUILT BY EDUCATORS, FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

This resource was created in collaboration with dedicated educators and school leaders who brought their experience, ideas, and insight to every step of the process. We're grateful for their partnership in building tools that truly make a difference in schools.



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