

Waltham Forest Early Years Guidance

Having Successful 'difficult' conversations

This guidance will support you in working effectively with families with SEND children. It will provide you with top tips to hold successful 'difficult' conversations. Using some of the techniques in the guidance will help to increase your confidence and skills in this area.

What's important?

- Parents / carers hold vital and unique knowledge about their child's needs.
- It is important that practitioners develop a relationship built on mutual trust and respect with parents / carers.
- The Code of Practice focuses on inclusive practice, removing barriers to learning and providing high quality provision that meets the needs of children.
- The participation of parents / carers and children with SEND should be increased in decision making, giving them more choice and control over the support they receive.



- Ensure you understand the family's background and current situation – in many cases there may be wider issues affecting the family.
- Be confident, knowledgeable and honest – you are not expected to know all the answers, but you can seek further advice and then feedback to the parent / carer.
- Allow parents / carers the opportunity to ask questions.
- Conversations should happen primarily between the keyperson and parent / carer – also engaging the settings SENCO.
- Try not to overwhelm the parent / carer with too many practitioners – this can be daunting and off-putting for them.

How to Have Successful Difficult Conversations

- Build a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. This may take time, but it will be worth the end results.



- Try to engage the parent / carer in different ways – not only focusing on SEND. E.g. invite them to open days or coffee mornings – make them feel part of the setting community.
- Signpost parents / carers to other support available locally.



Tips to Support You in Talking to Parents / Carers

- Before you engage in the conversation, think about what you want to accomplish. There's no harm in jotting down what your desired outcome is before having the conversation.
- Be clear about the issues.
- Highlight the child's strengths and let the parent / carer know what the child does well and the milestones he or she is meeting.
- Keep the conversation positive. Remember 'The sandwich method.' This is a form of feedback / discussion which starts with positive comments, is followed by areas of concerns and ends with further positives.
- Make sure you are well prepared. Invest time in building meaningful relationships with the parents / carers and discuss developmental progress regularly.



- Ensure you share positive and successful stories with parents / carers at frequent opportunities.
- Complete a milestone checklist for the child's age to help the parent know that you are basing your comments on facts and not just feelings.
- Encourage the parent / carer to share any concerns with relevant professionals. Remember it's not your role to make or even suggest a diagnosis. Remind parents / carers of the importance of acting early on concerns.
- Be comfortable with silence, don't feel the need to fill it with words.
- Be aware of your body language, your eye-contact, posture, hand gestures and tone of voice. Remember, it's not 'what' you say, it's 'how' you say it! Take into consideration a family's cultural norms.

Further reading and useful Information

[Developing positive relationships with parents](#)

[Communication with parents](#)

[Partnerships with parents](#)

Visit [The Hub](#) for further training on the SEND Passport