

## Sharing Sensitive News with Parents

Professionals who work with young children are often in a good position to notice delays in development. It is not always easy for a professional to express their concerns to a parent or caregiver and there is no one single way to express concerns. This overview can provide you with some helpful suggestions and ideas on how to get the conversation started with parents.

### **Before the Meeting**

- Try to select a ***convenient time*** for the parent(s).
- Choose a meeting ***location*** that is private and won't be interrupted.
- Allow enough ***time*** so parents can ask questions and discuss possible action plans.
- ***Prepare yourself*** for the meeting. In advance, organize any materials, documents, and possible referral information. Take some time to organize your thoughts.
- Have ***examples ready*** that support your observations.
- Review your approach with your supervisor and/or team.

### **During the Conversation**

- Greet the parents ***warmly*** and be mindful of your body language.
- Use ***clear language***. Don't use jargon.
- Highlight the ***child's strengths*** and use positive language.
- Give ***examples*** that help to illustrate your observations.
- Engage parents in the conversation – use ***open-ended questions*** and active listening.
- Invite parents to ***share their concerns*** about the child. They are the experts of their child.
- Build on what the parent says and ***encourage questions***.
- Be aware of ***parent reactions*** – feelings of anger, denial or guilt
- ***Do not give a diagnosis***.
- Suggest a second opinion or talk to another professional about the concern.
- ***Provide resources and referrals*** and look for ways that the child can be supported both at home and in the program.
- Recognize aspects of the ***family's culture or language*** that may act as barriers for the parent to ask questions. Seek an interpreter, if needed.

## **Next Steps**

- Parents know their child best and they will decide the course of action.
- Summarize the conversation and review the action plan with them.
- Encourage parents to come back for a follow-up meeting to allow parents time to think about what they have heard.
- Be sure parents receive the referral and resource information. Follow up to ask if they have all the information they need.
- Document your meeting.
- You may want to debrief with your supervisor.

## **Dealing with Reactions to Difficult News**

There may be times that a parent has a very strong reaction to the. They may react with feelings of shock, sadness, anger, disbelief or feelings of guilt. This can be an uncomfortable situation for both you and the parent. As professionals, it is important to ensure that parents are aware of your concerns and that they feel empowered to seek next steps.

### **Anger**

- Allow for the parent to express their anger early in the conversation. Check in with them through the conversation to see how they are feeling and their reaction.
- Ask the parent to identify the information that makes them angry.
- Suggest a quick break or reschedule the meeting for another time if needed.
- Be sure to let the parent know that you are there as a resource and support for the child and the family.

### **Denial**

- Do not try to convince the parent of the concern.
- Encourage other options for the parents or for a second opinion
- Develop a plan to compare observations to look at differences between home and the program setting.
- Be sure to let the parent know that you are there as a resource and support for the child and the family.
- If wait and see is suggested, remind parents that waiting could mean missing important stages to address the concerns.

### **Guilt/Blame**

- Highlight the positive aspects of the child and the parent.
- Be supportive and remain positive
- Remind the parent(s) it is not their fault and provide solutions
- Be sure to let the parent know that you are there as a resource and support for the child and the family.