



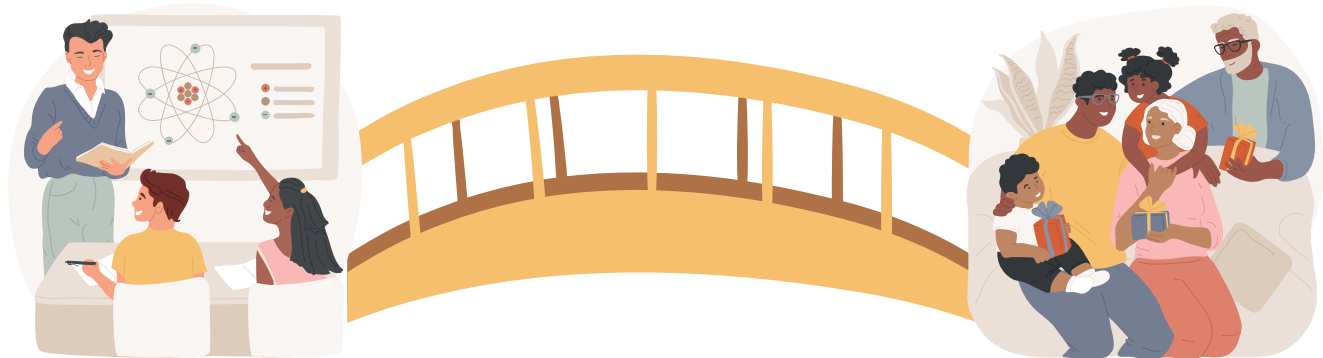
HAVING CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS WITH FAMILIES

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

The ability to truly listen to another and make them feel heard is a skill-set that takes intention and practice. Enter the conversation with a commitment to taking a listening and learning stance. Create the space for families to share what's on their mind, ask questions, offer perspective, and discuss both yours and their concerns. Allow families to speak without interruption. Ask follow up questions and affirm you hear and understand what they're sharing. Reinforce that families are the experts on their child and you want and need their expertise and partnership to address the challenge.

CONSIDER THE FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

A strong family-school partnership can build bridges between home and school and help to restore trust where it has been broken. For some families, school has historically been an experience of marginalization. Some families may bring these experiences into their relationships with you and/or their interactions with the school. **An honest and respectful conversation, even in difficult circumstances, can be a source of healing and progress.**



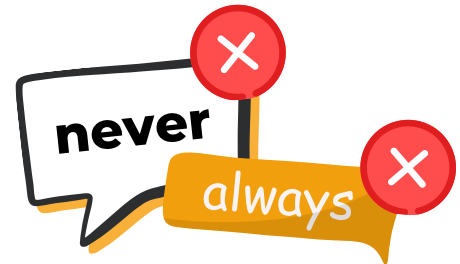
As you engage with families, consider what previous experiences they may have had and be aware of what families might be experiencing at the moment. If you're sharing information that could be discouraging to the student's family, be aware of your tone, word choice, and affect.



SPEAK IN SPECIFICS

When sharing information about a challenge, be sure to have complete, accurate and detailed information to share with families. **The conversation should be grounded in facts and evidence.** If you're discussing academics, have work samples and/or other data available to support what you're communicating.

If discussing behavior or other aspects of social-emotional well-being, discuss specific actions, words, observations or other relevant information. Avoid negative generalizations and language like "always" or "never" (e.g. "the student is always late for class" or "the student never completes their homework").



VALIDATE EMOTIONS THAT ARISE

Every family wants to see their child succeed. When having a conversation about a student's growth areas, recognize that the family might be feeling a range of emotions. A family member may feel defensive or skeptical about the information you're sharing. They may feel brief disappointment in their child, or place judgment on themselves as a parent.

Recognize and validate emotions as you see them emerge. This could sound like:

I know you may be feeling disappointed right now and understand this might be difficult to hear. I'm sharing with you because we both want what's best for [student] and I want you to have all of the information you need to support [student].

Naming the emotions that arise can help to address them and move past feelings so that you and the student's family can focus on solutions.



TAKE A SOLUTIONS-ORIENTED APPROACH

Keep the conversation focused on co-constructing solutions. **Focus on what it looks like/sounds like when the challenge is resolved.** Invite families to share their knowledge about their child with you and ask questions about what the family has done in the past to support their student when challenges arise. Ask family members to share what they think will help to address the challenge.



Offer concrete suggestions that the family can act upon, and make connections to others in the school community who can offer support. Articulate the actions everyone (you, the student, the family member) will take to support success. **Focus on what's possible** for the student when they have a strong team of family/educators working for their success.

PLANNING

GET CLEAR ON THE PURPOSE

- What do I want my student's family to take away/understand from the conversation?

- Complete this statement: *This conversation with my student's family will be successful when...*

SUSTAIN THE RELATIONSHIP

- What do I want/need to learn from my student's family in the conversation?

- What specific **positive** information around academics and/or social-emotional development can I share with the student's family?



COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY AND HONESTLY

- What specifically is my message to the student's family (about the challenge)?
- What data do I have on this specific challenge? What additional data do I need to collect?
- How might the student's family feel when they hear about this challenge?
- What will I tell my student's family that I have already tried/done to address this challenge?
- What do I want to be different in the future? What does it look like/sound like when this specific challenge is resolved?
- What support am I/the school offering to the student's family? What solutions am I proposing?
- What am I asking of the student's family? What do I want/need them to do in partnership with me?

