

PRACTITIONER GUIDE

Top Tips for having Honest Conversations

Professionals are required to have honest conversations with parents/carers, children, and other professionals they come in to contact with. It can sometimes be difficult to navigate these conversations, and to convey what you need to say in an understanding and accepting way.

This document provides guidance for professionals on how to have honest and, at times, difficult conversations. This should be used as a reference tool alongside practitioners own safeguarding practices/policies, and with appropriate supervision.

Principles

- Ensure your safeguarding policies are clear and up-to-date, including referral processes.
- Always be 'child centred' and focused on the safety and needs of the child.
- Be familiar with local services you can signpost to for further support e.g. health visitors, Early Help, parenting courses.
- Appreciate your own professional role in what you can do to support children and families within your own community networks and partnerships.

Having the Conversation

- Start on a positive note. Share what you need to, being open and honest and avoiding jargon.
- Explain your statutory duty to safeguard children's welfare, 'duty of care' and requirement to report your concerns.
- Be mindful of your tone, pitch and speed of voice. Be calm and make eye contact.
- **Listen** to the parent/carer, and **be empathetic**. Don't argue, pass judgement, jump to conclusions or let the parents/carers sentiment effect you. Encourage them to talk and summarise what they have said.
- Consider that their point of view may be influenced by bad experiences of services, lack of trust, learning difficulties, cultural and language barriers.
- Avoid words such as child abuse/protection and replace with 'concerns, welfare and duty of care'.
- Almost always with difficult conversations, there is a "now what?" that needs to be answered. Sometimes this can be simple steps, such as:
 1. Continue with the current support you are offering with a date to review; to more specific steps such as,
 2. A referral to children's Services.
- It is really helpful to end a difficult conversation by focusing on the future and giving the parent/carer a clear picture of what will happen next.

Planning

- Take some time to think things through. What are the main points/concerns you really want to make?
- Choose a time and a place to give full privacy and consider language barriers or learning difficulties of the parent/carer.
- If you know the parent/carer isn't going to agree with you, prepare for that emotion and response.
- Acknowledge your own anxieties to help support your communication style. Make a full assessment of the risks including previous history that suggests a parent/carer poses a risk.

If you feel it's too risky to speak with parents before speaking to children's social care, then don't.



Next Steps...

- Consider next what action you need to take following your conversation with the parent/carer.
- Professional curiosity – have you confirmed the responses you have received? Do you need to make further enquirers or speak to other agencies?
- Follow safeguarding procedures and seek further guidance from your safeguarding lead.
- Seek supervision from your safeguarding lead to reflect on what happened and what should happen next.
- If you are not satisfied with the outcome of any referrals made, and you still have concerns, follow your escalation policy.