

Courageous conversations: talking to your child's educator

Issue No. 024

This newsletter focuses on conversations between parents and educators. You may find the ideas useful for working with your child's doctor, maternal and child health nurse and other professionals.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the only conversations you had with your child's educator were positive – conversations about your child's new friends or your child's new interests?

The reality is that most of us, at some time, will need to talk about hard stuff.

Open communication is based on trust and respect. One way to build that trust is to have frequent conversations with educators. Talk to your child's educators when you drop your child off and pick your child up. If your child's educator is busy at this time, ask when would be the best time to catch up.

Tell them about the good things – what's happening in your child's life; new interests; a new milestone; the things you and your child like about the service. It's much harder to raise a concern if you haven't built a relationship of mutual respect beforehand.

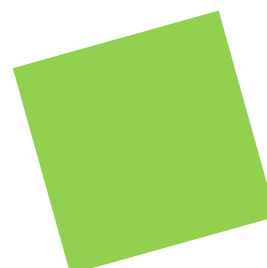
Assume you are on the same team – that's the idea of working together in partnership for the good of your child. You can expect your child's educator to keep your matter private; to deal with it promptly and to be professional. (They should not judge you or become defensive.) They will expect the same of you.

Here are some tips to help you raise concerns with your child's educator. If this direct approach doesn't address your concerns, ask to see the written procedure your educator uses for dealing with complaints.

What can families do?

- Raise your concern as early as possible – don't delay. (If you are feeling emotional, you might want to wait until you feel calm enough to talk.)
- Decide if it's best to have an informal conversation or to set a formal meeting time.

- Raise your concern directly and privately with the educator or if you feel you can't speak directly with your child's educator, speak with the centre nominated supervisor or director.. Don't have a hard conversation in front of other staff, parents or children.
- Decide if your own child should be present during the conversation. If the issue isn't sensitive, your child might benefit from seeing two adults working together to solve a problem. In other cases, it will be inappropriate for your child to be present.
- Be clear about what you want to discuss. Focus on the things that genuinely affect your child.
- Think about what you want for your child – what would be an acceptable outcome? Make some notes if that helps.
- Bring your ideas and notes to the conversation but be



prepared to ask questions and to listen. Your child may have told you what they've seen and heard – but the educator might have a bigger picture.

- Choose your words carefully: 'Can we talk about how Stephanie can build some friendships' assumes you are working in partnership. ('Why isn't Stephanie making friends?' may sound like an accusation.)
- Finish the conversation with at least one thing each of you can do. This gives you an opportunity to check in again at a later date.
- Always ask for a professional interpreter if language might be a barrier to effective communication as this may give you greater confidence in having a hard conversation. It's important that both you and the educator understand each other.
- Finally, congratulate yourself! It can be tough and emotional work advocating for your child – but it's one of the most important things you can do.

Related links

- [Parent Complaints – Child Care or Children's Services](#) – An information sheet prepared by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

You may also like to read

You may also like to read other titles in this series:

- Partnerships: working together

Other related newsletters can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au

