

**Talking with Parents When
You Have Concerns About
a Child in Your Care**

Developed by
California Map to Inclusive Child Care
WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies
Based on the article "Talking with Parents When Concerns Arise"
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Intent of This Presentation

To provide a framework for caregivers (anyone providing child care or out-of-school care for children)

- > when they have concerns that a child in their care might have a developmental delay, disability, or significant behavior problem
- > when preparing to share concerns with a child's parents or family members (anyone raising the child)
- > in understanding different ways family members will receive and act on the expressed concern

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Talking with Parents When Concerns Arise



As a caregiver, you may be the first person to notice a child who learns or communicates differently

- How do you determine that the difference is something to be concerned about?
- How do you decide when to have a formal conference to talk to parents or family members about your concerns?

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When to Have a Conference

- When you notice a difference in a child, you must think about that difference in relation to
 - typical, expected development
 - individual variations
 - interference with the child's ability to learn and grow
- If your careful observation and efforts to work effectively with a particular child
 - do not seem to be meeting the child's needs and/or
 - you feel that additional expertise is needed
 it's time to look for help and plan to formally discuss your concerns and ideas with the parent

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The Caregiver's Emotional Response

- Often when you, as a caregiver, are concerned about a child's development or behavior, you will probably have an emotional response
 - You may feel sad, nervous, or worried about what the future will be for this child
 - You may feel that the needs of this child are beyond your abilities to care for the child
 - You may be frustrated or angry that the family members have not done something to help the child

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Get to Know Your Feelings

- > It can be helpful to explore your reactions and feelings regarding your concerns for this child
 - What does the possibility that there are delays or behavior differences bring up in you emotionally?
 - Talk with a trusted colleague or other appropriate person about the situation
- > By understanding what you may be feeling, you can keep those feelings from interfering with your conversation with the family
- > Your fears, frustrations, or feelings may not be accurate to this child's specific situation

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Remember the Child



- > When focusing on concerns, possible implications, and the family's response, keep the child foremost in your mind
- > Every child has many positive qualities and strengths that remain when concerns arise
- > It may help to remember that this child is the focus of the family's love and your care
- > You can approach the sharing of concerns as an opportunity to support the child to become all that he or she can be

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Preparing for a Formal Conference

- > With prior regular small conversations, conferences won't come as a surprise to family members
- > Make careful observations of the child
- > Plan to discuss what you have observed in terms of **specific behaviors**
- > Research possible local resources and have the information and phone numbers ready for family



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The Best Setting for a Conference

- > Ask the family member or parent to schedule uninterrupted time
- > Make the family member feel comfortable and at ease as much as possible
- > Provide for privacy
- > Set aside enough time
- > Arrange for an interpreter if needed



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Conducting the Conference

- > **Start by asking** the family members how they see their child's development
 - Listen carefully to what they say to gain an understanding of how the family sees their child
- > Share any positive qualities you have observed
- > Ask how the child behaves at home
- > Before sharing concerns, ask if they have concerns they've not already indicated

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Sharing Your Concerns

- > Tell the family you are sharing concerns to get ideas for how to best meet their child's needs, to help their child be successful in your setting
 - Reflect on the family's perspective of their child as it will help you be sensitive when sharing your concerns
- > Communicate **your observations**
 - clearly
 - without judgment
 - with concrete examples
- > Do not label or diagnose! That is not our job.

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After Concerns are Shared

- Assure the family that you are there to support the child and incorporate new ideas
- Tell them you have information about services
 - within your program
 - local early intervention services
 - special education services
 - other potential resources



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The Family's Response

- Wait patiently as the family members think about and process the information you have shared
- Let the family members take the lead in determining the next steps
 - The family may be interested in referrals and welcome your support or
 - The family may be upset and/or not ready to access resources at this time
- It is important to be ready for any reaction and response from the family member

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Supporting Families Who Want to Access Resources

- Refer to early intervention program, local school district, or primary health care provider (pediatrician, family doctor, etc.)
- Before the meeting with the family, know which agency is most appropriate and have phone numbers or contact information available in writing
- Tell the family that, **with their permission**, you can provide **information directly to the agency**

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Supporting Families Not Ready To Access Resources

- Everyone moves at a different pace and accepts information differently
- Processing and integrating information will take families varying amounts of time
- Unless behavior or other issues (e.g., medical urgency) prevent you from caring for child without assistance, allow family to proceed on their own timeline

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When the Family Does Not Agree With Your Concern or is Upset

- The initial answer to your question of how the family sees their child's development will provide a clue for how they may react (slide 11)
- Your observations may surprise or upset a family
- Use active listening skills
- Support parents' feelings
- Suggest the family discuss this observation or information with other family members or another professional such as their doctor



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After the Conference

- Whatever the family decides, maintain ongoing communication with them
- If the child is assessed by a health care provider, early intervention, or special education team, ask for them to share suggestions and recommendations
 - If the child is not eligible or does not receive services from an outside agency, the suggestions will still be useful to you
 - If the child does receive outside services, your communication will have set the stage for partnership and collaboration with family as well as the specialists to meet the needs of the child in your setting.

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Get Support for Yourself

- > Sharing concerns with a family member requires planning, careful thought, and openness to the parents' responses
- > This is one of the most demanding tasks for a caregiver
- > Be sure to reach out to colleagues and supervisors for support before, during, and after the conference
- > Remember that your sensitive communication with the family can support the child to be all that they can be!



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Resources for Families

- > Health and medical service systems
 - Start with the child's primary health care provider
 - The California Childcare Health Line is a good resource for health information at www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org/
- > Local special education or early intervention services
 - The Family Resource Centers funded by California Early Start can be a starting point for early intervention or special education in the community at www.frnca.org/
 - The local school district should be able to identify resources for referrals at www.cde.ca.gov/ds/si/ds/pubschls.asp
- > Child Care
 - Find the local Resource & Referral Agency at www.rnnetwork.org

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For More Information

- > Websites
 - California Map to Inclusive Child Care: www.CAinclusivechildcare.org
 - California Preschool Instructional Networks (CPIN) www.cpin.us/
 - Program for Infant Toddler Care Partners for Quality (PITC PQ) Regional Support Network www.pitc.org/pub/pitc_docs/stipend.html
 - California School-Age Consortium (CAL SAC) www.calsac.org

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