

# THE MOST DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

**'You will need to have built a strong relationship with the family.'**

This is usually when you have to approach a family to outline your concerns about a child's development, especially when what you are telling the parents could change their lives. The ripple effects of this conversation will resonate for quite some time, so this conversation needs considerable planning.

You will need to have built a strong relationship with the family that is based on trust and respect. Hopefully, this rather formal conversation will not be a total surprise to the family, as you will have been asking thoughtful questions about the child's development and encouraging them to observe their child with you and at home.

**It is important to think carefully about:**

- **the time (have you made sure there will not be any interruptions?)**
- **the place (as private as possible, with adults chairs)**
- **organising with the family a mutual time**
- **who else should attend - watch the number of professionals and family is roughly equal.**

The purpose of this conversation is no different from any other conversation you would have with a family. You want the relationship with the family to be able to continue afterwards, even if the outcome of the meeting is a total disagreement about the situation that was being discussed.

**Always start with hearing from the family** how things are going for the child at home, when out shopping, at a friend's place, in the park, etc. Then compare and contrast this with what you are seeing in the service.

It is important that you approach this meeting trying to understand what might be occurring for the family when they hear what you have to say. It is quite possible they may be surprised, be very angry and be in denial about anything being different about their child. Perhaps writing a couple of points down will help.

Remember when the family finally agrees that something needs to be investigated, then a rollercoaster of appointments, assessments, interventions and diagnosis is likely to occur. So this may appear to initiate a family crisis. They may feel traumatised, scared, or singled out. You may bear the brunt of some of this emotion.

When you do sit down with the family to discuss your concerns about their child, this conversation has to be calm, polite and respectful, even if the response of the family is not quite what you were hoping for. Keep working on the relationship, so that when the family is finally ready to talk to you, they still feel safe and respected.

**When you are worried about a child's development or behaviour you could say:**

- **'How do you think (child) is going?'**
- **'I am really concerned about (child)'**
- **'We've noticed ..... Have you seen this at home?'**
- **'We do like to see (child's name) enjoying ..... but don't see them doing ..... Do you see this at home?'**
- **'Would you be able to spend some time, watching your child in the room with the other children?'**

Remember the time you put into your relationships with the families benefits the children and will make your workplace happier and more professionally satisfying.