

Conversation Leader Tips

Setting the Tone

- Leave your beliefs and ideas at the door. Your role is to hear others and help them to hear each other
- Make sure that the physical space creates intimacy and people can see each other's faces
- Remember that you are the Conversation Leader and people will only feel safe if you support openness and warmth and step-in if someone dominates or acts in a difficult way
- Be aware of your personality. If you are an extrovert, be aware that some people might find that overwhelming. If you are an introvert, be sure to speak up when necessary. Think about how you set the tone for how other people treat each other.

Focusing Attention & Keeping Conversation Flowing

- Conversation can flow in many directions, so start some of your comments with phrases that remind people of our focus, like: "Since we only have 30 minutes to discuss this..."
- Be aware of how much time there is for each topic and if some people have not had a chance to speak
- Use the Supportive or Assertive Conversation Skills listed below to keep things on track. They can help you to end a conflict or focus back on the questions

Being Aware of Differences

- People's communication is affected by their gender, family and ethnic heritage, their life experiences and their age. We want this richness to influence the conversation, not disrupt it.
- People communicate with their eyes and bodies as well as speaking. If someone is communicating that they are uncomfortable or have something to say, provide a chance for them to speak.

| When to be Supportive | When to be Assertive |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a parent is having a hard time making their thoughts clear to others • When a parent is feeling emotional about what they are sharing • When there seems to be strong agreement of difference of opinion among parents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When one parent is taking up too much of the conversation • When a parent is judging others • When the conversation is moving to other topics |
| What to Do | What to Do |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the focus on the speaker • Try to use your own words to capture what they are saying and the feeling they are sharing • Be brief • Try to match some of the emotion of the speaker to how you re-state | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the focus on your need to understand, not the speaker • Ask for more information so that you can understand • Avoid blaming or accusing, even if someone was disruptive or confrontational • Try to match some of the emotion of the speaker in your questions |
| <p>Examples: "So you feel that people in the community are not supportive" "Let me make sure I understand you. It would be helpful to you if schools were to..." "It sounds like the experience of being a teenage parent has been stressful" "It sounds like we have a difference of opinion in the room, but it also seems that we agree on..." "People seem surprised by your statement, can you share a little more about why you feel that way?"</p> | <p>Examples: "I understand that you are frustrated about that, but I am not sure that I understand. Can you give us an example of what happened?" "I would like to make sure that we capture your suggestions. Can you say that in another way?" "I want us to follow our <i>Ground Rule</i> of being respectful. Can we talk about our ideas in a calm way?" "I want to make sure that everyone has a chance to share. Can I hear what those of you who have not shared think about this question?" "I am sorry that was not clear. Let me try to say it another way"</p> |