TriPoint Autism & Literacy EDUCATION SERVICES

WHAT WE CARRY

An Educator's Checklist for Difficult Conversations With Families

Conversations about a child's learning needs can carry more weight than we realize. Families bring their knowledge, experiences, hopes, and concerns. Educators bring professional judgment, responsibility, and care.

This checklist offers a framework for approaching those conversations with clarity, compassion, and shared responsibility.

BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

- [ ] **Lead With Understanding**
  Consider what the family may already know, believe, or be worried about. Avoid assuming how they will respond.
- [ ] **Know What the Information Tells You**
  Review relevant observations, assessments, and instructional data. Distinguish what you know from what still needs to be explored.
- [ ] **Recognize the Child's Strengths**
  Prepare to discuss the whole child, not simply areas of difficulty.
- [ ] **Share the Responsibility**
  Determine whether administrators, specialists, or other appropriate team members should participate. These conversations should not rest on one educator alone.

DURING THE CONVERSATION

- [ ] **Invite the Family's Perspective**
  Ask what they are noticing at home and what they want you to understand about their child.
- [ ] **Communicate Concerns Without Jumping to Conclusions**
  Use clear, respectful language that explains what you are observing without making unsupported assumptions.
- [ ] **Make Space for Emotion and Questions**
  Allow families time to process information. Listen without labeling their reactions or assuming that disagreement means denial.
- [ ] **Balance Empathy With Honest Guidance**
  Acknowledge concerns while remaining clear about the child's learning needs and the importance of timely support.

AFTER THE CONVERSATION

- [ ] **Clarify the Next Steps**
  Identify agreed-upon actions, responsible team members, and any additional information or assessment needed.
- [ ] **Keep the Conversation Going**
  Establish when and how the team will reconnect, share progress, and revisit concerns.

LANGUAGE THAT BUILDS TRUST

Instead of jumping to conclusions:
"We're seeing some patterns that are worth paying attention to."

When families need time:
"We can slow this down without stopping it."

When concerns remain:
"I hear your hesitation, and I also want to be honest about what we're seeing."

A FINAL REMINDER

Empathy does not mean avoiding difficult conversations. Professional responsibility does not require carrying them alone. The goal is not to have the perfect words. It is to build a partnership that keeps the child's needs at the centre of the conversation.

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