

## PARENT CONVERSATION GUIDE

This guide is intended to help professionals engage parents in supportive conversations designed to assess for risks and needs and to promote family wellness and resilience. Establishing rapport with parents first using the following tips will help to build trust. It may take multiple conversations for parents to feel safe enough to share concerns & ask for help. Through the Consortium for Resilient Young Children, child care providers across our region have been using these strategies regularly to engage parents and have found them helpful.

### TIPS BEFORE YOU START THE CONVERSATION

#### Normalize the parent's experience.

Let them know it's normal to feel stressed right now, with the social distancing guidelines, worries around staying healthy, the economic challenges and uncertainties, and trying to work and parent with kids being home all day.

#### Reflect back what the parent says.

Each time they respond to a question, summarize the feeling or meaning behind what they said.

**Why:** Reflective statements allow them to hear out loud what they're thinking and feeling and shows them that you are listening and understanding what they are saying.

#### EXAMPLES OF REFLECTIONS:

##### If they say:

"I'm having a hard time trying to manage it all."

##### You could say:

"It sounds like you're feeling really stressed."

"Trying to work from home with your kids there all day sounds like a lot to manage."

"You have a lot on your plate right now."

"It sounds like you wish you had more support."

#### EXAMPLES OF AFFIRMATIONS:

"You're doing a great job of supporting your child through this."

"You're working really hard to provide for your family."

"That was really brave of you to reach out for help."

#### Affirm the parent for what they're doing well.

As often as you can, praise them for their efforts, for what they are doing well, for strengths they are showing, and for positive things that they care about.

**Why:** Affirmations help them to feel supported and builds up their sense of confidence and resilience.

#### Ask permission before making suggestions.

If you have resources or supports to offer, ask parents whether they want to hear about them first.

**Why:** Sometimes, people just want someone to listen, to understand what they are going through, and to care. They may not be looking for advice or help. Asking first empowers them with a sense of control and choice.

#### EXAMPLE OF ASKING PERMISSION:

"I know of a few resources that other parents have been using. Would you be interested in hearing about them?"

**Listen for indicators of the parent’s level of resilience.**

You may want to respond to them or support them differently based on where they are on the continuum below.

| ← WHERE IS THE PARENT ON THIS CONTINUUM? → |  |   |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|
|  |  | Hopeless/Detached   | Aware/Open to Support  | Hopeful/Engaged  |
| WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE                       |  | <p><b>Not open to help</b><br/>                     Numb or apathetic<br/>                     Depressed or flat mood<br/>                     Isolated or disconnected<br/>                     Negative view of themselves or the future<br/>                     Feels powerless or thinks nothing will change<br/>                     May blame, lack empathy, or be critical of their child</p> | <p><b>Open to help</b><br/>                     Stressed or conflicted<br/>                     May have mixed emotions<br/>                     May or may not have social supports<br/>                     Engages in conversation<br/>                     Recognizes what’s working and what’s not<br/>                     Thinks things can change<br/>                     Unsure what to do</p> | <p><b>Already have plans and are taking actions</b><br/>                     Empowered<br/>                     Has social supports<br/>                     Optimistic view of themselves or the future<br/>                     Engages in conversation<br/>                     Adapts to changes relatively easily<br/>                     Thinks things can change</p> |
| WHAT YOU CAN DO                            |  | <p><b>Help parents feel emotionally supported and socially connected.</b></p> <p><u>You could do this by:</u><br/>                     Building trust<br/>                     Reflecting back their feelings<br/>                     Demonstrating empathy<br/>                     Helping them connect with other families or virtual parent groups</p>   | <p><b>Offer parents resources and supports.</b></p> <p><u>You could do this by:</u><br/>                     Referring them to basic needs supports<br/>                     Offering online parenting or child-related resources<br/>                     Hosting virtual parent groups or activity/story times for kids</p>  | <p><b>Affirm and support what parents are already doing.</b></p> <p><u>You could do this by:</u><br/>                     Occasionally checking in<br/>                     Encouraging follow through<br/>                     Monitoring that their resilience remains high<br/>                     Helping them arrive at new solutions if initial plans do not work</p> |

**Let the parent know they are not alone.**

Being physically distant from others can feel pretty lonely, especially when we’re stressed or overwhelmed. Make it clear that the reason you are calling is because you care about them and are there to be a support for them. Let them know that they can reach out to you for support.

**If you are concerned about child abuse or neglect...**

Make a report to the children’s services agency in your county/state. The agency will ask you for the parent’s name and address, the child’s name, age, and current location, the reasons why you suspect abuse or neglect, and any details that you are aware of.

- Hamilton County: 513-241-KIDS (5437)      Kentucky (any county): 1-877-KYSAFE1 (597-2331)
- Butler County: 513-887-4055
- Warren County: 513-695-1546      Indiana (any county): 1-800-800-5556
- Clermont County: 513-732-STOP (7867)

For concerns about domestic violence, contact: Women Helping Women (513-381-5610) or YWCA (513-872-9259) in Cincinnati, Women’s Crisis Center (859-491-3335) in Northern Kentucky, or the Indiana Coalition Against Domestic Violence (800-332-7385) in Indiana.

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### QUESTIONS YOU COULD ASK

“How have the changes related to the coronavirus been impacting you & your family?”

“Who or what are your main sources of support right now?”

“What are you most concerned about right now?”

“Has anything bad, sad, or scary happened to you or your child recently?”  
[If yes & they don’t elaborate, ask] “Would you be willing to tell me about it?”

“Sometimes kids can have a difficult time coping with stressful events. How have you been supporting your child and taking care of yourself through this experience?”

### RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

#### CINCINNATI CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

##### Mental Health Support

Psychologists are available for brief phone sessions with parents (~15 minutes) to discuss coping strategies during the coronavirus and to determine if additional support is needed. Contact 513-636-8107 to schedule a session.

##### Resources for Helping Families Adapt to Disruptions Caused by Coronavirus

<https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/patients/coronavirus-information/family-resources>

##### Joining Forces for Children Resources for Families Related to the Coronavirus

<http://www.joiningforcesforchildren.org/resources/?topic=covid19>

### RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS

#### CONSORTIUM FOR RESILIENT YOUNG CHILDREN

##### Resilient Children and Families Program

Early childhood coaching and consultation services are available for professionals interested in strategies that promote the resilience of families raising young children. If interested, contact the program coordinator at 513-639-0869.