

Team around the Child Practitioners' Tips

Powerful Questions

When working in a solution focused way, it is important to draw out the views of parents and children carefully. If we ask directive questions, or offer suggestions ourselves too quickly, we can diminish the contributions of parents and children.

Tips for developing a good dialogue with parents and children include:

- **Don't be afraid of spaces and silence** – some people need time to process your question and form ideas; some people simply hope that if they stay quiet, the professionals will do all the talking and the discussion will be over sooner!
- **Allow some diversion** – again people may need to use these to give themselves time to process the issues, and come back to an answer when they are ready.
- **Give compliments** – acknowledge people's strengths when asking them to explore difficult issues. Say *"It's obvious to me that you care about John and want the best for him. You're doing really well to get him to nursery every day when things are so difficult...."*
- **Show you are positive and helpful** – your body language has to match your words, and your actions have to match too – never try to manipulate people with false promises or unrealistic offers.
- **Use powerful questions** – but don't over-use them.

Powerful questions are questions that prompt people to think and provide thoughtful answers. They are questions that encourage people to look at their situation differently and to uncover ideas.

Examples

- **When things are going well for you, what things are in place to make it go well?** (seeking exceptions to the problem, to build on)
- **What would be a good way for you to explore this situation?** (seeking style and preferences)
- **Is there anything about <<situation>> you want to get better?** (seeking goals)
- **If this situation was to change, what would life be like?** (seeking motivation)
- **If this situation was to change, what would we see to know it had changed?** (seeking specific indicators for assessing change)
- **Suppose you woke up tomorrow and a miracle had happened, and <<insert a statement that implies the situation has been resolved, e.g. "John keeps calm in difficult situations">>. What would we see?** (miracle question)
- **How do you manage to keep going in spite of all these challenges?** (Coping question, seeking strengths and resources)
- **Tell me about things that happen that you enjoy or that go well for you** (problem free talk, seeks strengths, resources and motivations)