7.4: Dealing with Differences

The Program for Infant/Toddler Caregivers (PITC) has outlined three steps in their training Dealing with Differences: Acknowledge, Ask, Adapt that can be used in early childhood programs that serve children of all ages.

**Step 1: Acknowledge**

How does the caregiver recognize the need for communication with the family? How does the caregiver’s attitude convey sincere interest and response? What can the caregiver say to the family to communicate awareness that there is a problem they need to jointly solve?

- Take time to think about how you feel about this issue and get clarity on the reasons behind your feelings.
- Listen carefully to the other person’s concern. If you bring up the concern, do it respectfully with an attitude of wanting to understand the issues.

**Step 2: Ask**

What questions can the caregiver ask the families to get information that will help her or him understand more precisely the families’ point of view?

- The next step is about data gathering, trying to get to the real sources of conflict or misunderstanding for the family, the child or you. Ask questions that seek to clarify (and allow families to ask questions to understand the program’s point-of-view).
- Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal responses. Restate what you think is being said, take time to be sure you are meaning the same thing in the language you are using.
Step 3: Adapt

How does the caregiver work with the family to define the issues and boundaries of the problem? Does the caregiver seek “common ground” as the basis for negotiation? How does the caregiver open up a negotiation with the family about what to do?

- Once the issues have been defined, seek out the common ground by stating your areas of greatest importance to each other. Listen carefully for areas of common agreement.
- Negotiate around the areas of important agreement and boundaries. Come to a resolution that addresses the real/major issues. Sometimes we have to agree to disagree. [92]

While using this method is a great start to get the most desired results, there will be instances when it won’t take place. A few outcomes to become familiar and comfortable with are different outcomes that may come during the conversation.

- Sometimes there may be a resolution through mutual understanding and negotiation. Both parties see the other’s perspective which is where both parties give a little or a lot.
- There may be a resolution that takes place through gradual education and understanding of the caregiver and seeing the perspective of the family.
- There can also be a resolution through the process of family education. This happens when the family sees the caregiver’s perspective and decides to change.
- Lastly, and it’s common, there can be no resolution. When this happens, the professional should look at Community Care Licensing Regulations (CCL), as well as internal policies and procedures to ensure no laws or rules are being violated. There are times when internal processes are created, but can be adjusted to meet the individual needs to families. These discussions and determinations should be made with the assistance and input of the site administrators. In some circumstances, the program and family may come to a mutual decision that the program is not a good fit for the family’s needs.

Conflicts related to diversity are inevitable and should not be seen or approached in a negative way but rather with the goal of partnering to create the best environment for the child to thrive while in your care. The process of partnering takes time, mutual understanding and for at least one person to take the first, often uncomfortable step.

A few things to remember:

1. All families want what’s best for their child and are doing what they believe is best
2. Be curious: what are the expectations the family has from you? From the program and for their child? This will help guide any conversations and interactions.
3. Become self-aware: what makes you uncomfortable? What are your personal beliefs?

Think About It…

Think about a time you had conflict related to diversity with a child in your classroom or family member. How could you have used these tools to create an equitable outcome?