

Getting a Kid talking

Getting a kid to start talking can be a really big challenge when we are engaging a kid in a Plan B conversation. It is important to keep in mind that there may be a lot of very good reasons for why they are having difficulty. The first thought that comes to mind is that he/she may be lacking basic language skills, but that might not be the only thing going on. When we are met with 'I don't know', shrug of the shoulders, silence, hostility, etc., it can be very challenging. It's good to be aware of your options when this occurs. We really only have four options when we are trying to understand and get the kids concern on the table and they are having difficulty talking.

We can ask more questions, or different questions. Being creative and asking questions that are open ended, developmentally appropriate, and refrain from judgment or opinion can be really helpful. We want to be careful that we 'drill' not 'grill' in this situation. Clarify if the child understands the question. We may need to reframe it more simply or ask it in a different way. The child may really not know, not have a concern about it, or not have the words to voice it.

We can reflectively listen. It is really important for the child to feel heard and reflecting back to the child even a minimalistic response can help get them talking. "I hear you saying that you really don't know what was happening for you in that situation." This keeps us in a neutral position of gathering information and giving the child the benefit of the doubt vs. assuming they just don't want to tell us. If a child offers anything, be sure we let them know we are listening.

We can hypothesize and offer ideas about what might be going on. If a child is really struggling, and you are struggling to identify a child's concern, it might be reasonable to offer an idea of what you think might be going on. It's important to check in with the child before offering your idea. If we just tell them what we think is going on, it can limit the child's view of empowerment and their collaborative role in the situation. We don't want to be the 'genius'. "I have an idea. Would it be ok if I shared my idea about what I think might be going on? It might not be right, but maybe you can tell me if I am close or that's not it."

We can offer reassurance

For many good reasons(conventional thinking) kids often feel like they might be in trouble, have messed up again, or we are going to ask them to do something they are not good at, when we engage them in a Plan B discussion. Reassurance can go a long way. It is important to verbalize our intentions and to offer reassurance during this information gathering process that we are really just trying to understand. We don't have all the answers, they aren't going to be in trouble for sharing their ideas/concerns, and that we are going to figure this out together. If the child starts talking we need to be sure we honor this agreement and we don't damage the relationship by using what they have said against them. Remember many of these kids have done the best they can and might have a history of perceived failure in solving some very difficult problems. We need to reassure them they are not in this alone and we are there to help. These options for responding when a child has difficulty with sharing their concerns/pov are not meant to be mutually exclusive. It is very feasible, and should be the case, that we are moving among these options in any given Plan B process.

Remember, if we get them talking at all, stick with it. We are building skills at the same time we are gathering the information that is going to help us solve the problem.



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