



GETTING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

Talking to your child's educator

Tips for having difficult conversations

Before you start ...

There are some important things to know before continuing.

Voices of lived experience

This resource is part of a series we created with families who have been through tough times to spark hope and new ideas for recognising, responding and standing up to shame and stigma.

We hope these resources have something to offer all families, but recognise they are simply a snapshot reflecting the lived experiences of the families who helped us create them – other families will have different experiences and stories.

We also intentionally create resources that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of *knowing, being and doing* with guidance from our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultancy Group and partners.

For more information please see emergingminds.com.au/working-with-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples

Language notes: 'Parents'

Emerging Minds acknowledges that families come in many forms. In our resources, the term 'parent' encompasses biological, adoptive, foster and kinship carers as well as individuals who have chosen to take up primary or shared responsibility in raising children. Our resources aim to support families and the children in their care. We acknowledge that every child is unique and has different strengths, vulnerabilities and experiences that shape their health and development.

This guide was developed by families for parents or carers who want to talk about their children's wellbeing to educators or staff at their child's school or early learning centre (ELC).

These types of conversations can sometimes be tricky and it is normal to feel unsure about where to start or what you want to say, especially if you or your family have experienced stigma or discrimination in the learning community.

Using this guide can help you figure out where to start and what might help when having challenging conversations with your child's educator.

Preparing for the conversation

Think about what your child and family are experiencing and write down some notes to take with you. When you meet with your child's educator, you might want to talk about:

- what they have noticed in your child
- what might be going on at home that could be relevant
- your family's strengths and supports
- what helps your child in tough times and any of the ways you have already been trying to address problems they are facing
- what you think your child's educator should know to support your family better
- what you hope to get out of the conversation and how it will impact your child
- ideas you might have for how the school could respond or support your family.

Keep your child in mind

Think about the needs of your child when preparing for the conversation with their school or ELC. Where possible, giving your child an opportunity to have a say about what's discussed can help them feel like they have some control over the decisions that affect them.

Ask your child for their point of view about speaking to their educator:

- Do they want to be there for the conversation?
- What do they want you to know?
- Is there anything they want you to share or *not* share?
- Are they worried about how they or their time at school or childcare could be affected by the outcome of the conversation?

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I wish grown-ups would listen to me.

ELEVEN-YEAR-OLD, KAURNA COUNTRY,
IN *THE THINGS THAT MATTER*¹

Write things down

Write down any concerns, questions or aims you have for the conversation. This will help you stay focused and ensure that you cover everything you want to talk about.

Build a relationship with your child's educators

If it is possible, getting to know your child's educators can help make it easier if you need to have discussions. This might be at parent-teacher interviews, drop-off or pick-up times, via email, or other events. Some educators are happy to talk any time, but some prefer you to book a time in, which can help you feel less rushed.

Speak to others for advice

If you are not sure how to approach the conversation with your child's school or ELC, you might like to speak to a trusted friend or family member, or a health professional, such as your family doctor/GP.

Consider bringing a support person

If you feel like it would help you to have extra support during the conversation, consider bringing a friend, a translator (if English is not your first language) or an [advocate](#). This can help you feel more confident and give you a better opportunity to communicate your concerns. It also means you'll have someone to help you remember and talk through the conversation with the educator afterwards, and if needed, discuss what to do next.

Know the school's/ELC's policies

Stigma can show up in the form of bullying behaviour for children at school, kindy or childcare. You might like to read the school's or ELC's communication or bullying policies. This will help you know what to expect and what your options are if you are not satisfied with the results of the conversation.

Take a look at Emerging Minds' bullying resources for guidance on what bullying involves, how it can impact children and what can be done to address bullying:
emergingminds.com.au/families/bullying

Having the conversation

You might like to circle a few of the following talking points and take this page with you. It is OK to show your child's educator that this is something you are using to help you.

- I wonder if we could have a chat about my child's wellbeing?
I have noticed ...
What have you noticed?
- I would really like to talk to you about some of the things that are going on in my child's life at the moment.
Can we make a time to do that?
- I have noticed that my child seems to be struggling with ...
Can we talk about ways that we can work together to support them?
- My child has told me that they are struggling with ...
Can we talk about ways that we can work together to support them?
- I think my child needs ...
Can we work out a way to support them together?
- I am a bit worried about my child's wellbeing and wondered: have you noticed anything out of the ordinary for their age?
- My child has not wanted to come to school/childcare recently and I wondered: have you seen anything that might help us understand this?
- Are there any wellbeing resources or services available to support my child or our family?
- How can we work together to ensure that my child's needs are being met both at home and at school/childcare?
- Is there anything else that I should be aware of or that you would like to discuss regarding my child's wellbeing?

Keeping the conversation going

Be open-minded

If the conversation is not going the way you expected, try to keep an open mind and consider the educator's perspective. Try to make sense of their point of view and see if there's a way to find common ground.



ARCHER, 9 YEARS OLD

Ask clarifying questions

If you don't understand something the educator is saying, don't be afraid to ask questions. This will help you understand their perspective and ensure that you are on the same page.

Take a break

If you feel like the conversation is becoming heated, unproductive or harmful, it is OK to take a break. You can suggest taking a few minutes to step away from the conversation and take a few deep breaths before continuing.

Look for solutions

Try to focus on finding solutions or shared goals. Ask the educator if there are any specific strategies or resources they can recommend to help your child.

Be willing to compromise

If you and the teacher have different ideas about how to address the issue, be open to finding a compromise that works for everyone. This could involve trying a new approach or seeking additional support.

Following up

If you are not able to resolve the issue during the initial conversation, make a plan to follow up with them or a member of the school's leadership team. Or you might reach out to a trusted friend or family member, or a health professional, such as your family doctor/GP. If you come up with a plan for helping your child, it can be worth checking in again after some time has passed to see how the plan is progressing.

Seeking support

Sometimes hard conversations in educational settings can cause distress for all sorts of different reasons. If you experience distress, please reach out to your support networks or a counselling or support service:
emergingminds.com.au/help

Recommended resources

Stigma can show up in the form of bullying behaviour for children at school, kindy or childcare. Take a look at Emerging Minds' bullying resources for guidance on what it is, how it can impact children and what can be done to address bullying:
emergingminds.com.au/families/bullying

AVAILABLE HERE

View all Shame and stigma resources



Are you a practitioner wanting to share this resource with a person or family?

First, check out our practitioner guide: emergingminds.com.au/resources/practitioner-guide-shame-and-stigma

Emerging Minds Families

For more resources to support the mental health and wellbeing of your family visit emergingminds.com.au/families

Or you can follow us on social media or our podcast channel:

 [instagram.com/emergingmindsau](https://www.instagram.com/emergingmindsau)

 [facebook.com/EMFamilies](https://www.facebook.com/EMFamilies)

 emergingminds.com.au/families/podcasts

References

1. Connolly, H. (2023). *The things that matter 4: Views of 8-12 year olds on life, school and community* (Project report no. 37). Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia.