



Tool 3: Family partnerships conversation tool

This conversation tool has been developed to help educators have respectful, sensitive and effective conversations about child mental health with families. It aims to help you establish a shared understanding with the family about how the child is going both at home and at early learning, so that you can put in place the most suitable support.

Who is this tool for?

This tool is aimed at educators who are implementing Step 2: ‘Conversation’ in the Family Partnerships Practice Model. It is for all educators regardless of their career stage, role or experience.

How to use this tool

This tool is one of a series of implementation tools within the Family Partnerships Guide, developed to support educators to use the Family Partnerships Practice Model in their service.

To get the most out of this tool we recommend using it alongside the Family Partnerships Practice Guide, particularly pages 25–32 that focus on step 2 (‘Conversation’) of the Family Partnerships Practice Model. This section of the guide includes:

- a section about conversations with families (that identifies strategies and techniques for these conversations)
- a snapshot about the CHILD domains (evidence-informed domains that help guide the conversation about key areas of a child’s life)
- an overview of this tool and how it fits within step 2 of the model (including a helpful checklist to make sure you have covered all the essential elements of this step).

This conversation tool has two parts:

1. A **template** for you to use to structure and lead the overall conversation with the family.

The template is divided into four sections and gives you the opportunity to add your own notes and questions to ask the family. The four parts of the conversation in the template are:

- » Introduction and setting the scene
- » Naming the concern and sharing your observations
- » Exploring both contexts and developing a shared understanding
- » Developing a plan and next steps

Once you have customised the template, save or print these pages to use in your conversation with parents.

2. A **bank of conversation starters** based on the CHILD domains. You can use these to put together a series of relevant questions and prompts to help guide your discussion at point 3 of the template, ‘Explore both contexts to develop a shared understanding’.

Choose your prompts and add them to your template in section 3.

The template also provides space to write down any notes to prepare for the conversation. This is optional and how much detail you include is up to you – it is there to help you plan and prepare for the conversation in the way that best works for you.

Family partnerships conversation tool: Template

The following template provides you with a suggested structure for conducting a conversation with a family about their child's mental health and wellbeing. It helps you to prepare by providing you with some wording to introduce the conversation in a sensitive and respectful manner, and allows you and the family to share your perspectives and observations in order to develop a shared understanding. The final part of the conversation is about making a plan of action to support the child.

Use the 'Your notes' section of the template to plan and prepare for the conversation – this is optional.

1. Introduction and setting the scene

<i>About this step</i>	<i>Your notes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Start the conversation by welcoming the family and providing a brief explanation of why you are here today (e.g. what has prompted the conversation).– This is where you frame the conversation and outline the purpose of the discussion – e.g. that the purpose of the conversation is to establish a shared understanding about the child (how they are going both at home and at early learning), and to identify what steps can be taken to provide further support.– Remember to lead with the child's strengths as part of setting the scene.	

2. Naming the concern and sharing your observations

<i>About this step</i>	<i>Your notes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– This is the process of clearly identifying and outlining the specific concern or issue that you want to discuss.– Share your observations about the child and their behaviour, including specific examples of how it is affecting their wellbeing.	

3. Exploring both contexts and developing a shared understanding

<i>About this step</i>	<i>Your notes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Exploring both contexts involves both you and the family sharing your observations about the child within the education and home contexts.- Ask the family to share their observations about the child and what they have been noticing at home, as well as their own perspective on the issue or concern you have presented.- A shared understanding sets the scene for deciding next steps for support. Reflect back to the family your understanding of their concerns and summarise your collective shared understanding of the issue.	

4. Developing a plan and next steps

<i>About this step</i>	<i>Your notes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The final part of the conversation is about developing a plan of action to support the child.- Start by defining shared goals. In collaboration with the family, define common objectives for supporting the child's mental health and wellbeing. Goals can be thought of as broad, overarching objectives or aims that you want to achieve in terms of the child's mental health and wellbeing. They represent a desired end result or outcome (i.e. what you want to achieve).- With reference to your shared goals, discuss possible actions to support the child. Actions are specific activities or supports that you implement to achieve your goals.- Review your collective understanding of the situation and define next steps, including support and possible referrals for additional professional input.	

Conversation starters

The five social and emotional wellbeing domains (CHILD)

Below is a framework for ‘conversation starters’ using the five CHILD social and emotional wellbeing domains. This acronym is designed to help you talk about and explore a child’s mental health and wellbeing. The five domains are all key elements of children’s social and emotional development, which we know are connected to mental health and wellbeing.

These questions have been developed to give you the language to more effectively talk about child mental health. They can be asked in section 3 (‘Exploring both contexts’) of your conversation. You can pick and choose which ones are most relevant to your conversation and adapt them to your context, to help get your conversation started.

The most important aspect of each domain can be found in the ‘What are we curious about?’ column of the following table. This is what will guide your conversation approach with the family. The example questions have been included to give you an idea of how these might translate into questions, but should be contextualised and adapted to your situation. They are a starting point to get you thinking, but they might not be exactly what you end up using.

Take some time to reflect on the questions and consider the appropriate tone, the best framing and how the specific language might need to be changed for each conversation. You can also develop your own questions for each of the domains based on what you already know about the child and their family.

Domain	What are we curious about?	Example questions
[A]bout the [C]hild	Getting a picture of what the child is generally like at home (their interests, habits, strengths, temperament).	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– ‘How would you describe what your child is generally like at home?’– ‘What are your child’s interests and hobbies?’– ‘What are your child’s strengths and areas of growth?’
[H]ome environment and routines	Understanding the family’s home environment and getting a picture of routines and rituals at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– ‘Who is in your family?’– ‘What is your family’s cultural background?’– ‘What are some of your child’s favourite activities at home?’– ‘How does your child usually manage daily routines – such as sleep, mealtimes and going to bed?’– ‘Have you observed any changes in your child’s behaviour, sleep patterns, or daily routines that you think might be worth discussing?’– ‘Have there been any life events, transitions or circumstances that may be impacting your child’s overall wellbeing?’
[I]nteractions and relationships	Understanding the child’s social skills and development, including interactions with others and relationships at early learning and at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– ‘Can you tell me about your child’s friendships? How do they generally interact with other children?’– ‘How does your child approach new social situations or unfamiliar environments?’– ‘Have you noticed any changes in how your child communicates or interacts with other children?’

Domain	What are we curious about?	Example questions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Has your child talked about any challenges with friends?' - 'Have you noticed any changes in your child's social behaviour when they're excited, anxious, or upset?' - 'How does your child handle conflicts or disagreements with other children or adults?' - 'Are there any social activities or group situations that your child avoids or is uncomfortable about?'
<p>[L]inks to the community and support networks</p>	<p>Understanding and identifying what other support networks the child has outside of their immediate family.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Are there any extended family members or adults outside the family who play a significant role in your child's life? How do these relationships impact their overall wellbeing?' - 'Are there any regular group activities (such as sports, clubs, cultural or religious activities) that your child participates in outside of the early learning service)? How does your child enjoy these activities?' - 'Are there events, celebrations or gatherings (including social, religious or cultural events) your child looks forward to attending within your community?' - 'Do you have any supports (both individuals or services) in your community that you can turn to for advice or guidance related to your child's development?'
<p>[D]evelopment</p>	<p>Understanding the child's social and emotional development and any behavioural concerns either you or the family have.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'How does your child express and manage their emotions? Are there certain emotions or situations where they seem to struggle more?' - 'What happens when your child is upset, worried or angry? How do they show you they're feeling this way? Are there particular strategies you use to manage these emotions?' - 'Have you noticed any changes in your child's emotional wellbeing, such as their mood or reactions to different situations?' - 'Do you have any concerns about your child's self-esteem, self-confidence, or overall emotional wellbeing?' - 'Does your child appear more unsettled than usual?' - 'What do you do to manage any worries that your child might have?' - 'Are there any of your child's behaviours that you find especially difficult to manage? How often is this behaviour an issue or concern for you?' - 'What has helped you to better understand your child's emotions and behaviours?'