

Caring Conversations: Opening Doors for Partnerships with Families

South Dakota Home Visitor Institute
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Head Start Regional TTA Network

Meet The Presenters



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Region 8 TTA



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Region 8 TTA



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What Lens Do You Bring?

- Program
 - Early Head Start
 - Head Start Preschool
 - Other Home Visiting
- Role
 - Program Manager or Coordinator
 - Home Visitor/Direct Service Staff
 - Other
- Age group served
 - Prenatal/Adults Only
 - Infants & Toddlers
 - 3–5-year-olds
- What did we miss?



These materials were developed for OHS/Region 8... Training and Technical Assistance Network under Contract No. 140D0421C0007 by STGI.

Context



Head Start programs:

- Provide access to high-quality services and thus reduce the immediate and overall impact of homelessness.
- Enroll families experiencing homelessness as a matter of urgency and opportunity.
- Build trusting relationships and access to services by respectfully using the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of homelessness.



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Language Matters

When discussing the topic of homelessness, our words matter.
Consider the following:

- People-first language acknowledges the individual before the situation (families experiencing homelessness).
- Homelessness does not define the family or the child.
- Homeless is a situation the family is experiencing, not a status.
- The McKinney-Vento Act's Definition of Homelessness includes many examples of situations that qualify as homelessness but not a precise definition.
- Conversations with families about their living situation do not have to include the word homeless.

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Sharing and Learning


- As we have modified our language over the years to honor families' lived experiences, we have discovered many ways to talk about living situations without ever using the word homeless.
- What are some words and phrases that your programs use as alternatives?

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Our Language Matters



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DM0

Reflection

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What challenges has your program faced when enrolling children and families experiencing homelessness or other sensitive situations?



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Slide 10

DM0 Just curious... Are the word/thought bubbles supposed to be blank in the image?

Damon Manning, 2024-10-29T14:30:29.888

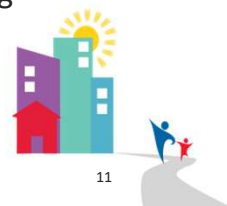
AD0 0 Hello Damon! Yes, they are blank. The graphic design wants to invite participants to chat ;)

Alejandra Davis, 2024-10-29T15:33:05.959

Categorical Eligibility Options Can Increase Access to Head Start Programs

- Use of the McKinney-Vento Act definition of Homelessness to determine eligibility is required for all Head Start programs.
- Leadership can drive the application of this definition through policies, procedures, outreach to families and training for staff.
- Staff can implement the use of this definition through caring conversations about housing.
- Eligibility increases access and contributes to equity for families and children.

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Key Tips for Using Conversations to Determine Eligibility

- ☐ Consider beginning the enrollment process with conversations about living situations before discussing income eligibility.
- ☐ Encourage the use of relatable language about living situations when interacting with families, both in conversation and on program forms.
- ☐ Be sure to check on families' living situations over time, should their circumstances change (ex. As you would for other circumstances like food insecurity).
- ☐ Revise and implement data collection procedures to accurately count the number of children and families experiencing homelessness the program has served, from the time of enrollment to completion of the enrollment year.
- ☐ Seek out partnerships with local school district homelessness liaisons along with state and local organizations that can provide enrollment referrals and offer supports to families experiencing homelessness.



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ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Head Start



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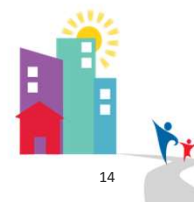
Caring Conversations



Purpose of Caring Conversations

- Promote relationship building in situations where sensitive information must be gathered.
- Honor the specific values, interests, and cultural characteristics of the families the program serves.
- Build trust, especially when staff are openly willing to acknowledge their biases about what may be impacting families' living situations.

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Using Parent Voice in the Development of Caring Conversations Resource

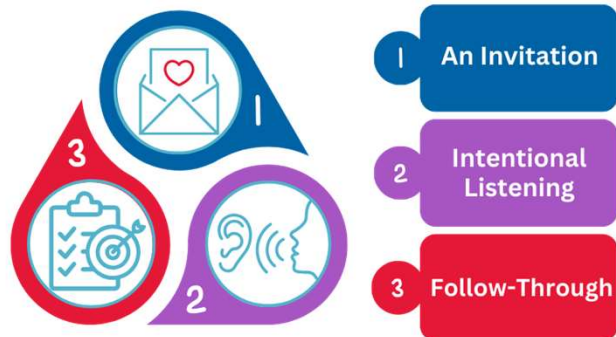
- Parents' voices set the tone and direction for caring conversations.
- Parents shared their feelings and reactions to commonly used interviewing methods.
- Parents recommended a caring approach.
- Parents suggested that program staff listen to recommendations of local parents to increase enrollment.

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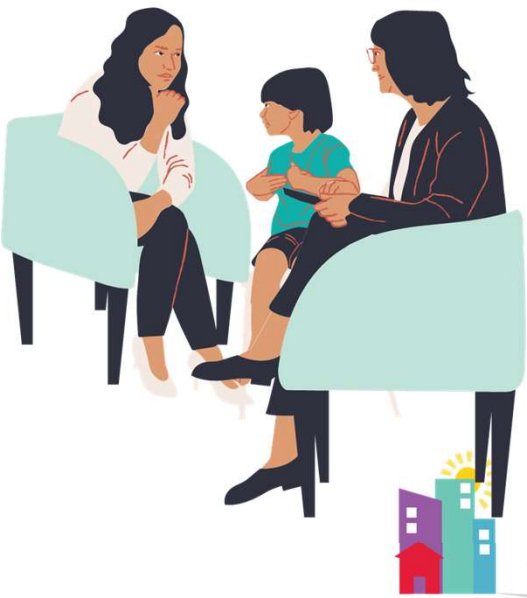
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Phases of a Caring Conversation



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An Invitation

The first phase of a caring conversation begins with a simple invitation for the family to share their story.

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What Staff Might Say



Tell me about you and your family.







This statement allows the family to guide the conversation and share information they feel is relevant.

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What Staff Might Say



We talk with all families about age and income when thinking about eligibility. We also talk with all families about current living circumstances and any resources families receive or would like to learn more about. Sometimes, families' living circumstances make them eligible for our program. Would you be comfortable sharing a little bit about your living circumstances?





This statement provides a universal, caring approach that lets families know this is the approach you take with all families. If their living situation is of concern, important information could be forthcoming.

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Intentional Listening

- Apply a strengths-based approach.
- Use communication skills related to active listening.
- Listen for statements related to housing.



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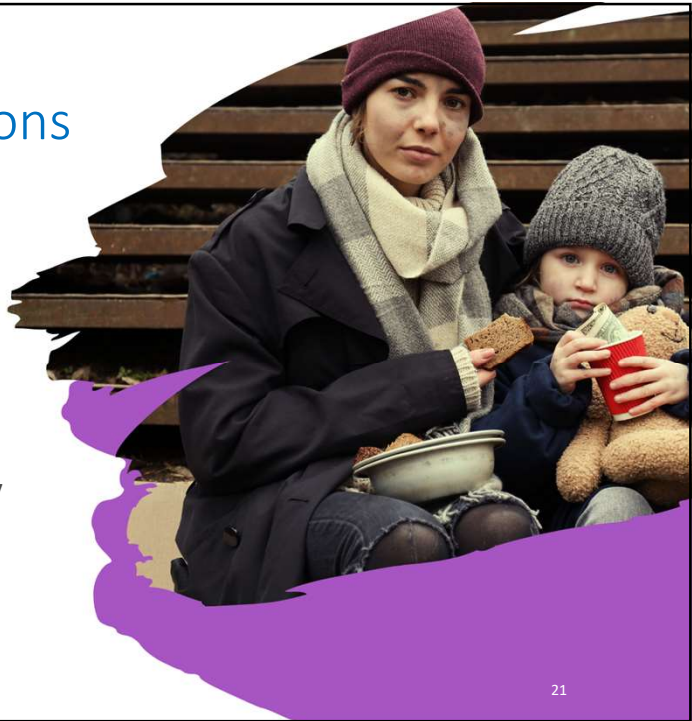


Clarifying Questions

The purpose of using clarifying questions is to:

- Gather additional information when housing challenges are revealed.
- Assist staff in making mental connections to the McKinney-Vento Act's definition.
- Use in response to content when family shares their story.
- Not a checklist or a fact-finding tool for staff to use during discussions with families.

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What Staff Might Say



I think you may have said you are sharing housing right now. May I ask you a few questions?

- Are you staying with family or friends for a long time, or is it temporary?
- Are you staying with family and friends due to challenges related to loss of employment, an accident, loss of benefits, or some other unexpected hardship?
- Could you be asked to leave suddenly or unexpectedly?



During their interactions with a family, staff can honor the family's customs by being genuinely interested in learning why the family shares living spaces. Many families choose to live together for cultural reasons or economic benefits. These reasons are very different from economic hardship.

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Clarifying Questions When Families Mention Safety



- Is there anything in your living situation that you would like to be able to change?
- Does where you live feel like a safe place for you and your children?
- Is there anything that makes you worry about the safety of you or your family?

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Follow-through

- Maintain open communication with colleagues to create more supportive experiences for families.
- Ensure that enrollment processes with community partners are well-coordinated.
- Communicate effectively with community partners, such as educational homeless liaisons and local housing coordinators.

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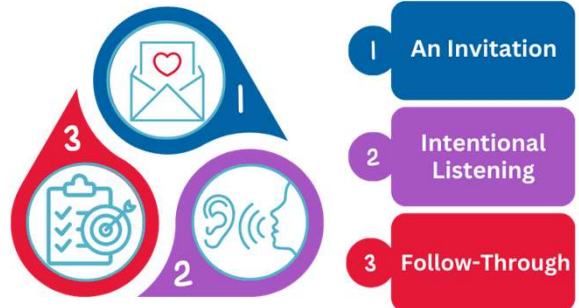
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Program Considerations

Program leadership and management can implement caring conversations to determine eligibility by:

- Embedding caring conversations into policies and procedures to determine eligibility.
- Incorporating caring conversation practices into staff training.
- Seeking families' input when making changes to the program's existing approaches.



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Strategizing Activity



- Write the three (3) phases of a Caring Conversation on chart paper. BTO
- At your table, reflect on each phase to identify clarifying questions or additional strategies that could contribute to the implementation of Caring Conversations in your program.
- Then, connect with the table next to you and review your reflections to see if you have similar or different thoughts about how you might use the Caring Conversations approach. DM1

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Slide 26

BT0 Edited this language
Brandi Black Thacker, 2024-10-14T15:25:01.146

AD0 0 Thank you Brandi! :)
Alejandra Davis, 2024-10-25T19:37:16.319

DM1 "next to you"? (since everyone partnering to their right would
leave tables without a partnering table)
Damon Manning, 2024-10-29T14:41:19.825

AD1 0 Thank you, Damón! Change done :)
Alejandra Davis, 2024-10-29T15:36:38.872

Call to Action



What is one action you
can take to advance your
work in applying the
phases of Caring
Conversations to support
families?

(you and your skills)



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Reflection



What are you inspired to
do (in your work with
families) after our time
together today?



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Your Feedback is Important to Us!



Training Topic: Caring Conversations

Training Date: November 20, 2024



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