

## Information sheet

### Preparation and planning

You need to prepare yourself for a dialogue. You may have had a very difficult day, you may have had a problem at home; something may have gone wrong or broken down but these things need to be forgotten about. You are there to discuss an important issue with the young person.

You need to think about your own attitudes and values – the young person may be doing something that you are completely against. OK, we're not asking you to agree with the young person, we are asking you to listen and understand. Ask the young person if it's OK to discuss the issue – it's about being open and honest. So you can actually say "I have a concern about a particular aspect of your behaviour. Do you agree it causes you problems?" The key to the process is that they understand why you are asking certain questions. They need to know that if they disagree with anything you say they can say so. They need to understand that it's OK to ask you questions. It's about ensuring it's a two-way process.

**Ted Daskiewicz**

Clarify in your own mind what you want to achieve in a conversation with a learner. Be realistic: choose something achievable.

When you know what you want to focus on, you will be better able to:

- prepare yourself and the learner;
- recognise when the conversation is drifting off course and bring it back on track;
- make efficient use of your time and the learner's; seek relevant information from your colleagues (see **What information do you need?**).

### Setting up the meeting

Tell the learner:

- when and where the meeting will be held;
- how long it will take;

- the purpose of the meeting.

By communicating clarity and purpose, you will be modelling the self-management skills that you would like learners to acquire.

## **What information you need?**

With all the other demands on your time and attention, you could find yourself turning up to a meeting without the information you need. Take a few minutes in advance to:

- put together any documents, reports, etc., relevant to the learner and the meeting you are going to have;
- ask colleagues if they have any new and relevant information to share;
- check your own records of previous meetings with the learner.

## **The physical space**

You may have limited choice about the space in which you have conversations with your learners. Nevertheless, be aware that the environment can have an effect on the quality of your conversation, so do what you can to:

- choose the most suitable room, for example, one that is quiet, allows a confidential discussion, and has no negative connections for learners;
- adjust the layout of the furniture to give you a non-confrontational setting;
- choose chairs that allow you and the learner to sit in a relaxed way.

If possible, find a space that has positive associations for the learner.

## **Preparing yourself**

No matter when you plan to have a conversation with a learner, you are likely to have many things on your mind. These preoccupations risk getting in the way of your maintaining your full concentration when the learner is talking to you. So take a few minutes to:

- clear your mind of other pressures and claims on your time;
- be aware of any frustration, irritation or other negative feelings you may have in relation to the learner, and put them to one side;

- remind yourself of the learner's positive attributes and achievements.

Doing this will help you to see the learner as an individual and to give them your undivided attention.

## **Using the skills**

Remind yourself of the ethos that should inform the dialogue:

- The learner should drive the conversation.
- Your purpose is to help the learner work through their ambivalence to change.

Revise the skills you will use. Early on, some tutors find it useful to have a brief *aide mémoire* with them to remind them of some of the skills they will use. If you find this useful be careful not to convey to the learner that you are working from a secret checklist. You could tell them that the prompts are there to help you make the conversation go well.

Consider whether you will have one of the activities to hand to help the learner talk. You must judge whether the technique will be really useful and be prepared to abandon it if it is not productive.

Completing the activity is not the goal – eliciting change talk is.

## **Opening the conversation**

Although you will have told the learner in advance about the meeting and its purpose, it is worth repeating that information at the start. So open the conversation by:

- welcoming the learner;
- reminding the learner of the purpose of the conversation;
- saying what you would like to achieve by the end;
- stating the time you have set aside for the conversation;
- checking whether there is anything on the learner's mind that needs to be dealt with before you begin your planned conversation.

Once you have dealt with these preliminaries, start the discussion by asking an open question that relates to the purpose of the meeting.

For example:

**Welcome:** Graham, thank you for coming in today.

**Purpose:** Your workplace supervisor has told me about the incident yesterday. I'd like to hear your side of the story...

**Outcome:** ... so that we can decide what to do next.

**Time:** We've got up to 20 minutes for this conversation.

**Checking:** Is there anything else on your mind that might prevent you from talking about yesterday's incident?  
(*Graham shakes his head.*)

**Open question:** OK then. Tell me what happened.

#### **Watch out for ...**

If you do not prepare yourself carefully, there is a danger that the conversation will stray into blind alleys and be less productive than it might have been.

It is not always possible to predict accurately how much time a conversation will need. So tell the learner at the outset that if the conversation needs more time than you have allocated, it can be continued on another occasion. This will avoid either of you feeling rushed towards the end.

\*Ted Daszkiewicz and Paul Lalgée supported the development of the 'motivational dialogue' resources for the Standards Unit E2E resources. The resources are based on:

Miller W.R. and Rollnick S., *Motivational interviewing: preparing people for change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York, Guilford Publications, Inc.

Further information can also be found at: [www.motivationalinterview.org](http://www.motivationalinterview.org)