



**Barking &  
Dagenham**

London  
Borough of  
Barking and  
Dagenham

**“Here to  
Equip you for  
Practice...”**

one borough; one community; no one left behind

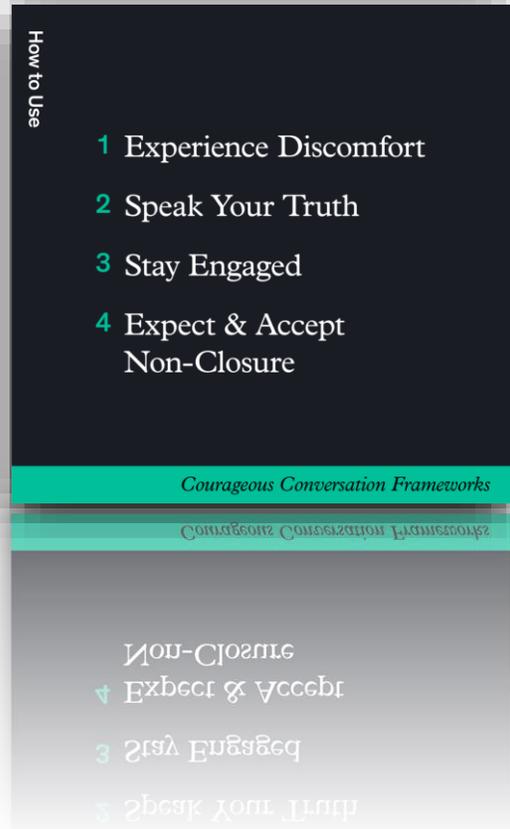
### 3 Element of our Practice Framework- What makes us Unique.

1. We know you have difficult conversations with children and families all the time, and that these can be hard. We will help you build your **courage** in these **conversations** and give you the relational tools to **successfully engage**.
2. In the midst of increased demand and timescales, our ability to be curious can go out the window! This can lead to missed risks and ultimately poorer outcomes for children. We will provide refreshers in how to remain **professionally curious** at all times.
3. “**Language** is power”- the use of the right language can either open doors or close them for you literally. We will help you reflect on the language you use, reduce social work jargon, recognise power differentials and be more child-centric in how you converse.

# Courageous Conversations

## Why “Courageous?”

- **Because we have to go out of our comfort zone to discuss potentially difficult subject matter at any one point of the day-the role demands this but doesn’t often train/prepare you for it**
- **Conversations about abuse and harm, assessment recommendations, proceedings and removal, fostering and adoption, performance, sickness..a seemingly endless list**
- **We need to face up to this because we intervene in the privacy of family life and want to show respect rather than power and high moral standing- we want to naturally collaborate but process and demand often lead us to become punitive. Preserving relationship so those we work with don’t feel “done to” demands we know how to talk and this for many requires courage..**
- **Evolutionary psychology- Our brains work overtime to help us preserve relationships and avoid anything that threatens the stability of our interactions with other people. Having a difficult conversation is working against an entire evolutionary process.**



And Now to the How ?? The steps...

### 1. **Face up** to courageous conversations

It is easy to opt for a “wait and see” approach to dealing with the situation-sometimes there is wisdom in this – but often it is because we want to avoid conflict, disagreement and potential fall-out. Having a difficult conversation is painful-let’s **name and validate** it- we all need to recognise this as the first step.

### 2. **Choose your time well**

Balance your timescales with the need to be human and sensitive to the other person- telling a family struggling with poverty they need to buy better furniture to address neglect isn’t logical, practical or kind

Recognise that some things can wait and will achieve greater impact and **do practice patience**

Know when something cant wait based on risk and think about the best time to share

### 3. **Choose the place well**

Who will be around when you share difficult news-do they need to be there? Can you share outside of the home-maybe a walk in the park? Beware meetings to share difficult information as public exposure can be humiliating and shut down relationship

#### 4. Consider your **manner** of delivery

- Have a **plan**- rehearse but don't over-rehearse! Remember open questions create relationship, while too many closed questions do not! Have space to reflect afterwards
- Be **direct** but gentle and respectful- don't mince your words as parents tell us they prefer SW's who are transparent and honest to them from the start, rather than secretive and withhold key information about their plans etc.
- Be **specific**- ensure you detail everything that needs to be said to them, so telling a parent about your recommendation for them to access alcohol breathalysing, don't say "*Janet I have observed that you are drinking alcohol a lot and this worries me about the impact on the kids. because of this we want you to access services to help you.*" Later Janet finds out you want her breathalysed twice weekly and is angry as you never mentioned this-why not?...
- Mind your **language**- remember language is power. The words you choose to use can either help others collaborate with you and build trust, or introduce assumptions, stereotypes and mistrust. Research cultures, phrases and foods to help! Practice professional boundaries.
- **Listen well and use advanced empathy**- no one likes it when they are telling you something important and you are looking over their shoulder or preoccupied with your phone! Even if they respond with aggression and shouting, still try to listen and don't take it personally..

## Professional Curiosity- Can we think the unthinkable?

**Professional curiosity** is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting service users' versions of events or disclosures at face value. This can be described as the need for practitioners to practice '**respectful uncertainty**'.

While we can't be flies on the wall knowing everything happening to our families, we can be curious about it, option, so for a child there may be numerous and when we disprove next one. This keeps us judgments leading to



we can weigh up every possible regularly arriving late for school, possibilities...we weigh them up one we park it and move to the curious and prevents fixed punitive measures and burnout.

### **Ways to keep curious** (and avoid process burnout):

- Check background chronologies and genograms- be culturally curious!
- Ask the right open questions with "how, why, what if?"
- Share your findings during 1-1 and group supervision so that others can contribute
- Embrace your own inner child to stay child focused
- Hypothesise and challenge assumptions and things taken at face value such as police reports, parental compliance and judgmental language such as "offender"

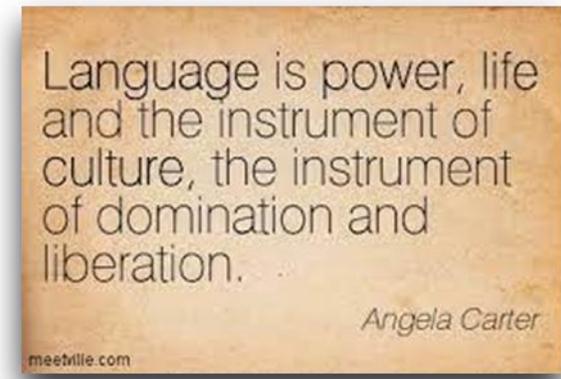
It's all about Language.. and **Language is power!**

Let's name some words/phrases and other jargon we use everyday at work which do not feel child-centric?

**Words/Phrases etc.**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Alternatives**



Let's enjoy our role-it's a privilege we have to enter people's lives at their most vulnerable points and help them. You are unique because of your ability to be that person..



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