

# TOPIC:

## Courageous Conversations

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Micro Training Course Developed

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### INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

\*Read through this self-study

\*Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire

\*Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.

Oftentimes, resource parents may find themselves having to engage in discussion over uncomfortable topics. Whether it's social injustice, cultural differences, boundary-setting, disconnect in parenting or advocating for the needs of a child, it can be challenging for communication especially when working with people that are unfamiliar to us. As humans, we will do anything we can to avoid discomfort around taboo topics or hard subjects, but sometimes it is necessary to have uncomfortable conversations or "courageous conversations." When we can get to the other side of a courageous conversation, we find new information, relief, common ground, and an opportunity to better understand those we work with.

*Courageous Conversations* are not an everyday action, but rather come about at times of social-emotional challenge and under impactful circumstances. In courageous conversations, we do not seek to prove someone wrong or even to change their mind. Courageous conversations impart perspective and allow for a safe space to try and understand one another. There are four main elements to courageous conversations, that if upheld should support a person trying to get through a difficult topic. Those are: *Staying Engaged*, *Experiencing Discomfort*, *Expecting and Accepting Non-Closure*, and *Speaking Our Truth*.

- **Stay Engaged** In communicating, we receive and transmit information through our words, in our tone, with our body language, and with our use of eye contact. In daily life, all too easily we step out of situations we don't want to be in. What happens if stepping out of the conversation could have lasting impacts on a person you care about (i.e., a foster youth)? *Staying engaged* means keeping one's self-regulated through emotionally impactful dialogue. Being aware of triggers and potential responses is only part of staying engaged. We must also remain committed to trying to understand where a person's perspective is coming from. Staying engaged does not mean you have to finish an entire courageous conversation in one go, but it does mean that no matter the difficulty, staying committed to the conversation is essential.

For Example: *Speaking with a social worker who has just told you that you lack the intelligence to understand the complexities of the case*

- **Experience Discomfort** It is not easy to stay engaged with difficult dialogue. Our body has ways of telling us that we are being physically or emotionally threatened. We get shaky hands and can stumble



### Four Elements of Courageous Conversations

*Stay Engaged.*

*Speak Your Truth.*

*Experience Discomfort.*

*Expect and Accept Non-Closure.*

through our words. We may feel our face flush, or feel our heart rate or breathing increase. These are signals that the brain is telling us to get out of danger. If we go into a courageous conversation knowing we will probably get uncomfortable in the process, then it can help in staying engaged. Being uncomfortable but still continuing on with dialogue are signs of growth and being open (maybe even vulnerable) to the other individual. If there is no discomfort in a courageous conversation, consider pushing the dialogue a little more deeply.

There is a difference between being uncomfortable and being unsafe. Courageous conversations should not be used in times of heightened emotion or distress; rather used when participants are more regulated and supported.

For Example: *Speaking to a birth parent about making empty promises of returning home soon*

- **Expect and Accept Non-Closure** When going into a conversation, we usually have an end goal in mind. We are typically asking or directing to an end result. Courageous conversations do not always work that way. Dialogue may not reach a point of closure or mutual agreement. The person initiating the conversation may not have it turned out that they expected, or perhaps the conversation gets cut short. Expressing impact and listening to understand do not always mean gaining closure and a sense of communal understanding. More times than not a person will leave a courageous conversation feeling awkward and unfinished, but like planting a seed we cannot expect instant outcomes from sowing a conversation. We have to allow time and understanding that we are all in differing stages of growth.

For Example: *Speaking about a child's whole experiences and not just present medical symptoms when a doctor in the clinic dismisses your prompts about a child's trauma history being taken into consideration for diagnosis*

- **Speak Our Truth** It is through growth we are able to change and better understand each other. Part of growth is *speaking our truth*. In a courageous conversation, we need to be bravely honest in our speech, both to ourselves and the person we are having dialogue with. Making yourself vulnerable and truly sharing your thoughts in perspective will have better grounding in the courageous conversation. Speaking our truth means thinking throughout our discussion about the words being used and their possible impact. We need to speak our truth thoughtfully and in safety, but not necessarily in comfort.

For Example: *Speaking about impacts and enduring relationships to another foster parent when they attempt to make a joke about the LGBTQ youth that has been placed with them*

In considering whether to have a courageous conversation or when might be an appropriate time, keep in mind the purpose behind the conversation. Think about your intent behind the conversation and the impact it may have on you and the other person. Go into the conversation being regulated and courageous, not emotional. Realize the conversation may be difficult to get through or may not have the end result that you are expecting, but stay with it. Understand that while they can be uncomfortable, practicing courageous conversations create confidence in being able to do it again a next time. And that might be the time that makes the difference.

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