

The CHANGES Communication Tool – An Overview

ADULT: C - Communicate What Happened (Past)

Here is where we put together all the tools we gathered. We bring forward the research, the information we culled, and our beliefs and values, and we tell our child what has happened. We create space for our child to tell us how they feel about what has happened.

CHILD: H - How Do You Feel and What Thoughts Do You Have About What Happened? (Past)

This is where we want our child to tell us everything they think and feel about what happened. We want them to get it all out, and it's our job to ask questions and illicit information so they can share. This isn't the time for us to share how we feel and what we think about this situation (because sadly, it's not about us even though it might actually be about us, but just not in this conversation), it is about intentionally asking questions to get the child to reflect on what they think and how these thoughts fuel their feelings.

ADULT: A - And Today . . . (Present)

And today, here is what is happening! Here is where we share what is happening now. This is the present moment. There may be some life situations that have been greatly affected by what happened, and this is where we lay those out for our child. Use words that keep your child in the present as much as possible during this step. "Right now," "in the moment," "for today," "this week," etc. Think about the small things that may be big things to your child. For example, changes to driving schedules, school attendance, family visits, or medical appointments.

CHILD: N - Nerves, Worries, and Fears. What worries and fears does the child have about what has happened in the past and what might happen in the future? (Present)

Take the lid off those worries and let them all pour out. Let your child's river of fear flow. This is where we really talk about being "in it," and there may be a lot swirling around. If you can get your child to brainstorm every possible scary thing that feels like it is happening, this is the place for it. Scary ideas lose a lot of their power when they get spoken out loud. Fear is only as big as our minds make it out to be. As your child downloads their worries and fears to you, embrace them without judgment or comment. Your only job here is to metaphorically hold those fears and worries in your heart and hands as your child lightens their load.

Note: Kids are amazing and they often find positives in the midst of the worst situations. This is also the step where you might hear about things they are excited about. They might like some of the changes and will want to talk about their happiness, hope, and joy in the middle of all the change. This is the sweet bite during a hard conversation. Welcome these ideas without judgment, just as you are welcoming all the other thoughts and feelings.

ADULT: G - Going Forward . . . What might happen next? (Future)

This is a really important step for us as adults to front-load our child with a picture of what the future might hold. Do we know how things will play out for sure? Likely not, but can we give them some idea of next steps? Yes. So, let's do it. To the best of your knowledge, let your child know how the next few weeks, months, years will look. Share the parts you do know and be clear about what you don't know. Telling your child that no one knows how something will go is actually telling them about the future and demonstrates to them that some things are in our

control while other things are not. This may be where your beliefs and values are front and center, so be sure you didn't skip that step when you were prepping for this conversation.

CHILD: E - Everything and Everyone That Could Be Helpful: What resources and supports do we have going forward? (Future)

We want our children to start to see how they are strong and capable and resourceful, and that they can get through this difficult change because learning to thrive after hardship is a building block for resilience later in life. Their confidence is literally building one life struggle at a time, rather than being undermined or destroyed. Additionally, we also want to help children see the resources and supports that are available to them. We want to ask them what resources they have during this step. Imagine being informed about what your child's perception (which is your child's reality) of their supports are by having them tell you what they are?! Brilliant. Brilliant because when we know who and what brings them safety, support, and comfort, we know what to bring more of into their lives. We will also know where the gaps are and where we need to fill them. We need to know who their people are. Who they can talk to. What they can do when they are having a hard day. What things bring them comfort. Let your child tell you. They may be little, but they be mighty. By listening and creating space for more of whatever they need, we're giving our kids three messages: they are the experts on themselves, what feels safe and helpful to them matters to us, and we want to know what they need.

BOTH: S - Silly and Serious Questions

Anyone can ask questions during any of the above steps, but it's important to make time to see what questions have come up while working through the previous six steps. A curious mind is healthy and positive and something we want to nurture in our child. Here we want our children to practice asking questions and making connections while ultimately expanding their understanding. We can show them that we are practicing our own growth mindset through this change as well by asking our own questions, seeking clarity from the child, and demonstrating that we are on our own learning journey as well.

There is no measurement of success that involves how much your child shares or what emotions are identified, because your child is not going to remember what words are said during this conversation anyway. Your child will only remember how they felt.