



essential conversations project®

**What do I say?:
Facilitating Essential Conversations**

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What we are going to talk about

- What is an Essential Conversation?
- What is your role in Essential Conversations with families?
- How can you help families start an Essential Conversation using SEEP™?
- Understanding Position vs. Interest
- Improving communication with older adults
- Essential Conversations Project®



Essential Conversations Are...

- Talking to the most important people about the most important things in our lives
 - Example: talking to SDM and other family members
- A marriage between the practical and the emotional
- This is not just about reaching a decision... it is about acknowledging and honouring the emotional components of decision-making



Transitions and Planning

- Planning decisions impact older person AND everyone else involved with him/her
- Much more than pragmatic decisions: they stimulate much emotion for all concerned.

... Resurrecting past hurts, wounds, and unresolved matters



Grief and Loss

- No matter the positive outcome, all transitions involve grief and loss
- The impact of some transitions can result in a loss of independence for more than just the older adult



Trajectory of acceptance

Everyone at different places ...



Your Roles in Essential Conversations

You are an avid listener... sitting back and being quiet while absorbing perspectives, thoughts, and feelings.

You are neutral - judgments and assumptions stop the listening.

You are not the expert, nor the problem solver.

You do not have a pre-set outcome in mind.

You are curious to learn more with every contact.

You fully appreciate the values of autonomy and self-determination.



The Goals of Essential Conversations

- Develop trust and build relationships
- Understand and acknowledge all perspectives
- Create an atmosphere of openness which allows families to talk through their concerns and anxieties
- Plant seeds for ideas (not answers)
- Take off the Facilitator 'hat' to share wisdom and offer direction
- Identify common wishes
- Help families set goals and find their own solutions



How can you help families start talking?



SEEP™

Listen to the **Story**

Validate the **Emotion**

Normalize the **Experience**

Create the **Plan**

*Active listening on steroids ...
hearing what is being said on a meta-level*

... and when you SEEP™

You empower and strengthen others to make their own decisions; to move from a state of confusion, anxiety, disorganization ...

to at state of certainty, confidence, direction and organization.



Position vs. Interest



Story

We
hear

Positions

We need to
listen for

Interests

Aspects of Negotiation

Positions

What you argue for or say that you want

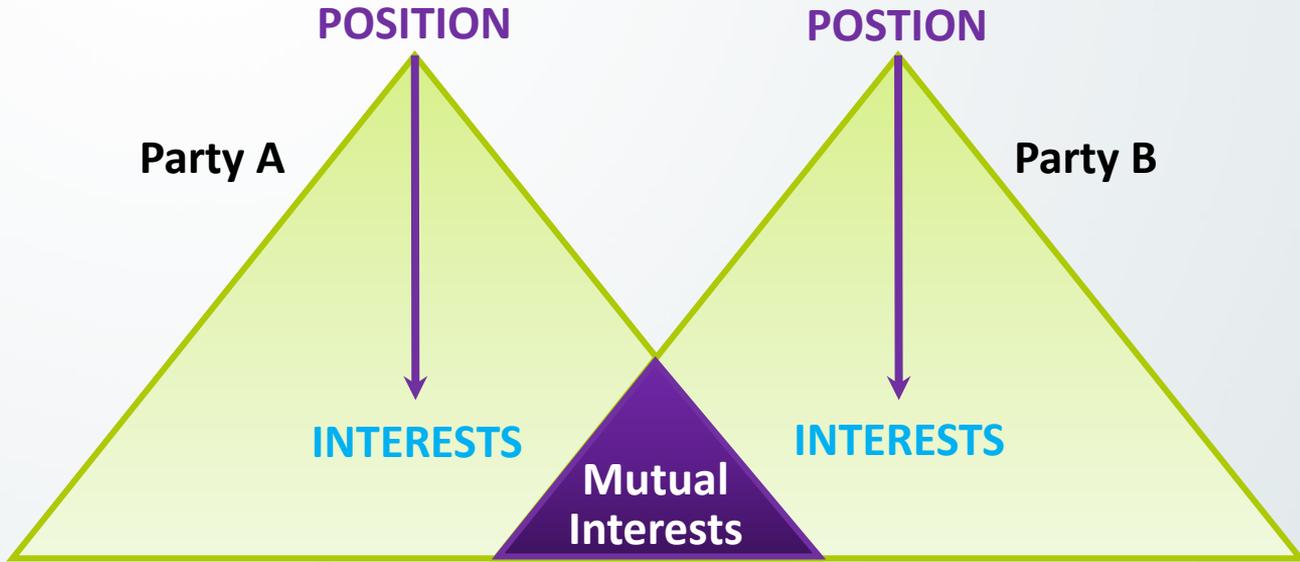
- Likely to be concrete
- Explicit
- Something already decided upon

Interests

Needs, desires, concerns, fears

- Unexpressed
- Intangible
- Perhaps inconsistent
- What caused the decision

Facilitating a Conversation – “Commonalities”



POSITION: A solution which meets my interests.

INTERESTS: Needs, wants, fears, concerns.

Interests motivate people to form positions.



Improving Communication with Older Adults

Old Age

- What is old age and when does it begin?
- What do we call older people – Senior? Older Adult?

Stereotypes of Aging and Growing Old

- What are the first words that pop into your head when you think of being old or growing old?
- What do you hear other people say?
- What do you see portrayed in the media?



Impacts of Stereotypes

- Harvard Study
- Study on Stereotypes and Self-Esteem



Professionals and Knowledge about Aging

- A lack of knowledge and understanding of older persons can contribute to treating them inappropriately, overlooking their needs, or exacerbating situations.
- Examples?

Stop and Ask...

**What is an Aging Effect
vs.
a Cohort Effect ?**

Old Does Not Mean Incapable or Incompetent

- ADLs and IADLs
- Focus on what people CAN do vs. functional limitations – people adapt!
- Resilience and adaptability vary
- Watch tendency to overlay our own abilities and values about these
- Goal: Seek to understand the older person' views on their own aging and capabilities



Improving Communication with Older Adults

- Be specific and concise
- Emphasize the most important take-home points
- Have them repeat in their words and/or teach-back
- Example: think about yourself with MD or accountant



Tips for Responding to Hearing Loss

- Eliminate extra noise
- Face the person
- Have your lip level at theirs
- Slow down
- Restate words if not understood
- Leave messages slowly and say name and number twice



Communicating with Those with Dementia

- Avoid Elderspeak
- Offer comfort and reassurance – emotion vs. content
- Limit distractions
- Use open, supportive body language
- Use tips from Alzheimer's Association



Essential Conversations Project™ - process differential

Traditional Mediation



Essential Conversations Project
Facilitation Process



20%

80%

The ECP process recognizes and emphasizes the importance of individual meetings as a means to understanding family dynamics. Each participant's perspective is fully explored before any group meeting takes place.





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We believe...

**Every family deserves an
Essential Conversation™**