The Five Critical Conversations for a Smooth Transition to Kindergarten

A Guide for Collaborative Partnerships between Families, Preschool, and Kindergarten Teams

Transitioning to kindergarten is a **process, not a single event.** To ensure success, equity, and belonging for all children—especially those with disabilities—families and educators should engage in these **five essential conversations.**

1. Setting the Stage: What can children and families expect in kindergarten?

This conversation aligns expectations between environments to reduce stress for the child.

For Caregivers:	What will they expect my child to know on the first day? What do I need to know to be prepared?
For K Teachers:	How can I describe my classroom environment, standards, and behavior expectations to the family?
Goal:	Compare preschool routines with kindergarten standards to identify gaps and prepare the child.

2. Sharing the Journey: What would you like us to know about your child and your family's story?

Families have critical information about their unique journey that teachers need to understand.

For Caregivers:	What experiences or diagnoses impact my child? What are our goals for them?
For P Teachers:	What specific supports were found to be helpful this past year?
Goal:	Understand the family's strengths and past successes to maintain continuity of support.

3. Social-Emotional Support: How does your child do with friendships and big feelings, and how can we support them best?

Cognitive and social competence in kindergarten is a major predictor of later academic success.

For Caregivers:	How does my child share emotions or engage with peers at home?
For Teachers:	What were the behavior expectations in preschool, and what individualized supports are needed for kindergarten success?
Goal:	Create a plan to support the child's emotional regulation and peer interactions.

4. Building on Strengths: What really helps your child learn, and how can we build on their strengths?

Individualized supports are necessary to meet the needs of diverse learners.

For Caregivers:	What have I seen my child do with reading or math at home?
For P Teachers:	Did the child meet end-of-year expectations, and what support did they require?
Goal:	Identify academic strengths and determine which successful preschool strategies can be continued.

5. Action Planning: What can we all do—together—to make their move to kindergarten go smoothly?

A successful transition relies on high-intensity practices like collaborative planning meetings.

For Caregivers:	What resources or tools do I need to support my child at home before school starts?
For Teachers:	What specific actions must I take to ensure the child has what they need for day one?
Goal:	Establish a communication plan to ensure ongoing success throughout the year.

The Foundations of a Strong Partnership

For these conversations to be effective, teams must demonstrate these **six characteristics of interpersonal partnerships**:

1. **Mutual Respect:** Acknowledging each person's essential role and information.
2. **Shared Responsibility:** Fulfilling legal and ethical obligations to the child.
3. **Open Communication:** Willingness to share questions and concerns honestly.
4. **Shared Decision Making:** Actively involving all members in the planning process.
5. **Active Listening:** Demonstrating a genuine desire to understand one another.
6. **Trust and Commitment:** Demonstrating reliability, care, and consideration.

Why These Conversations Matter

When families and teachers collaborate proactively, it leads to **increased student achievement, improved attendance, and stronger social-emotional skills.** Honest and proactive communication is the key to closing the gap between preschool and kindergarten.

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