

Navigating Complex Conversations

Direct

Direct them to a knowledgeable expert or decision-maker.

Use when: you don't have the authority to make a necessary decision or the knowledge to provide a confident answer.

Avoid when: you're worried the issue will fall through the cracks or get stalled out; an answer is needed immediately.

Defer

Defer to relevant policy or legislation.

Use when: you want to create clarity and alignment; your own knowledge is still developing; you want to remove feelings and opinions from the equation.

Avoid when: you know that trust in the system is low.

Share

Share a relevant resource from a trusted source – a blog post, video, pamphlet, flyer, or book.

Use when: there is a genuine willingness to learn more; there is a specific piece of information being sought.

Avoid when: time or interest is low; human connection is being sought.

Dig Deeper

Stay curious. Ask questions that help reveal hopes, fears, and assumptions – both theirs and your own!

Use when: you believe there is potential for an in-depth conversation and have the capacity for it; you want a relational approach.

Avoid when: you might be creating a platform for harmful speech.

Stand Proud

Don't let the conversation get muddy. State your ethical principles in a clear, succinct, unwavering manner.

Use when: you know that the work is good and evidence-based; you want to get ahead of insincere engagement.

Avoid when: you aren't personally sure of the connection between principle and practice.

Acknowledge

Sometimes, all you need to do is listen and tell the person that their concern is noted.

Use when: you don't anticipate making progress or building trust; the person doesn't hold decision-making or gate-keeping power.

Avoid when: there is the potential for harm or escalation if their viewpoint is validated.



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Some Tricky Situations

Practice using one of the 6 response strategies.

Field Trip

An overnight field trip has been announced for your grade 6 class, which includes a student who has socially transitioned and identifies as a girl. Before having a chance to consult with this student, her parents, and your administrators about what her sleeping arrangements will be, an agitated parent comes up to you with questions about whether you will “protect” the other girls in the class while on this trip. There are five group cabins designated for students. Any private accommodations on site are currently all designated for educators and chaperones.

How do you navigate the conversation with this parent?

How do you make decisions about the sleeping arrangements?

What changes if a variety of accommodations are available?

Engaging with Parents

During Pride Week in June, the school’s GSA organizes small learning moments to be shared during the daily announcements, including definitions for the acronym 2SLGBTQ+. A parent comes to you with concerns about what his child learned. He insists that this is something that should only happen during sexual health education, which he should get the opportunity to opt out of.

How do you respond?

Staff Room

While on break in the staff room, another educator rolls their eyes and makes a joke about students’ identities. You see them scanning the room, looking for an appreciative audience. You know that you have at least one gay coworker on staff.

Do you engage in a conversation? What do you say?

Washrooms

A student confides in you that she feels uncomfortable with the fact that a trans classmate accesses the same shared washrooms as her. She is a member of a religious minority community and says that it goes against her religious customs and beliefs. There is one single stall gender-neutral bathroom in the school.

How do you respond to this student?

Report Card

A senior high student has asked that their name and pronouns be officially updated in the official school record. Doing so would change what shows up on report cards and correspondences, and you know that the parents are not affirming or supportive of their child’s changing identity.

How do you make this decision?

How do you navigate the conversations with this student and their parents?

