

Why this resource?

Carers are often asked to have difficult conversations within complex systems, particularly when advocating for a child's safety and wellbeing. This module **gently supports carers to find their voice, feel more confident and grounded when speaking up**, and understand advocacy as a natural part of caring well. It acknowledges that speaking up can feel hard not because carers lack skill, but because systems can feel overwhelming, inconsistent, or intimidating.

Working in partnership

Children are best supported when the adults around them work collaboratively and respectfully. Strong partnerships reduce fragmentation, support consistency, and help children feel safer within complex systems.

Carers bring vital day-to-day and relational knowledge of the child, while professionals contribute system knowledge, major decisions, and access to resources. Effective partnership is child-centred, grounded in curiosity rather than judgement, shared in responsibility, and supported by clear, transparent communication.

Practical strategies for carers:

- Jot down your key concerns and what you're hoping for before important conversations
- Use care plans or written notes to keep discussions clear and focused on the child
- Acknowledge system limits while still naming what the child needs
- Ask who makes decisions and what happens if views differ
- Ask for regular check-ins to stay connected and avoid confusion
- Follow up conversations with a short message or email
- Lean on professionals who know the child well and can support your concerns
- Keep clear boundaries—working well together doesn't mean doing more than your role

When to raise concerns

Carers are often the first to notice changes in a child's behaviour, wellbeing, or sense of safety. Raising concerns is part of caring protectively, not a failure or conflict.

Concerns may need to be raised when:

- A child's safety or wellbeing is affected
- Needs remain unmet despite earlier conversations
- Worrying patterns continue over time
- Decisions don't fit the child's developmental needs or experiences

When raising concerns, focus on what you observe, describe the impact on the child, link to what is already known, and keep language calm and respectful.



Courageous Conversations

Continued....

Addressing conflict

Conflict is common in high-stress systems and doesn't automatically mean something has gone wrong. It can be fuelled by differing views of risk, delays, communication breakdowns, power imbalances, and emotional load.

When navigating conflict, carers can:

- Name the issue: be clear about the concern and its impact on the child
- Separate the person from the problem: focus on decisions or processes, not blame
- Clarify the child's needs: identify what support is needed right now
- Explore options: consider what's possible and who needs to be involved
- Agree on next steps: set clear actions, timeframes, and review points

These steps help keep conversations focused, constructive, and centred on the child.

De-escalating yourself & others

Heightened emotion reduces the capacity for listening, problem-solving, and shared decision-making, and can cause a child's needs to be lost beneath urgency or defensiveness. De-escalation is not about avoiding issues, but about creating the conditions to address them clearly and safely.

De-escalating Yourself: the P.A.U.S.E. framework

- **P** – Pause: stop before responding; silence can be grounding
- **A** – Acknowledge: notice what you're feeling
- **U** – Unhook: remind yourself you don't need to react immediately
- **S** – Stabilise: slow your breath and ground your body
- **E** – Engage intentionally: choose words that serve the child

The P.A.U.S.E. framework helps carers respond with intention rather than reactivity.

Giving & Receiving Feedback

Giving and receiving feedback is a normal part of caring within systems and can feel uncomfortable, especially where power differences exist.

When giving feedback, keep it simple: say what you've noticed, how it's affecting the child, and what you're asking for.

Example:

"I've noticed contact changes have increased anxiety and sleep issues. Can we look at making arrangements more predictable?"

When receiving feedback, it's normal to feel defensive. Pausing, asking for clarity, and remembering feedback is about actions, not your worth can help. If feedback feels unsafe or unfair, you can ask for time, seek support, and document your perspective. Feedback is about improving outcomes for children, not judging your care.

How to speak up respectfully

Focus on what you observe and how it affects the child. Use calm, factual language, be clear about what you're asking for, and stay solution-focused. Choose a good time for conversations and follow up in writing where helpful.

Examples:

- **Observation–Impact–Request:**
- *"Since contact changed, [child] seems more anxious and is waking at night. I'm concerned about their wellbeing. Could we look at ways to support them?"*
- **Holding the child alongside system limits:**
- *"I understand there are pressures, and I'm still concerned about the impact on [child]. Can we explore options?"*
- **Following up:**
- *"Thanks for today. Just confirming we agreed on these next steps..."*

Further Reading & Resources

Emerging Minds - Watch, Listen, Read Resources & Toolkits on a range on topics related to the above.

Suggested Training: Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/library/>