



The following document was contributed to the Toolkit by ABCD Faculty Member Dan Duncan.

Porch Time – Learning Conversations

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Healthy, safe and strong communities are places filled with care. Care is what residents of a neighborhood offer when they become engaged and involved in the life of their neighborhood. Engaged residents might go next door to offer a meal to a homebound senior or read a book to a child down the street.

We cannot build strong caring neighborhoods without unlocking the potential of the residents.

However, Care can remain invisible without intentional conversations to discover what people have to offer and what they are passionate about.

In doing our work we must understand that everyone in the neighborhood has something to offer (their gifts) and everyone cares about something (their passions). And, to be successful we need the residents of a neighborhood to become involved and share their gifts, based on their passion. We need to find the residents in the neighborhood who care about young children and ask them to become involved in the lives of the young children in their neighborhood by sharing their gifts.

One of the most effective ways to unlock the power of the people in the neighborhood that care about young children is through **Learning Conversations**.

Learning Conversations are purposeful conversations with the residents designed to discover the gifts of the residents that they are willing to share related to their passion.

The goals of Learning Conversation are to:

- Build trust and establish a relationship
- Discover gifts and passions
- Explore mutual interests and clarify possible action steps
- Find more prospects

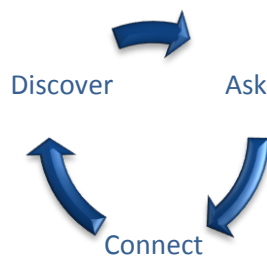
What people care about, what they are passionate about is their motivation to act; to become involved and engaged; to share their gifts.

Passion = Motivation to Act: “What I will go out the door and do something about”

- Concerns – What I do not want to happen
- Dreams – What I want to create
- Gifts – What I have the opportunity to give

The three elements of effective learning conversations:

- **Identify** the gifts and passions of the residents in a neighborhood.
- **Ask**, the residents to become involved and share their gifts based on the passions.
- **Connect**, people with the same passions to act collectively.



The goal is Identify what people care about their - motivation to act and what they have to contribute, not to determine just what they have opinions about (“Someone ought to”)

- Hint: To build stronger relationships and trust. Whenever possible, if you are not a resident of the neighborhood talk to people that you have been introduced to by a resident of the neighborhood.

To be effective the principles of Learning Conversations include:

- Ask Questions do not give answers
- Ask “what can you contribute?” not “What do you need?”
- Invite next steps, ask people to become involved
- To grow the circle, always ask “Who else do you know that I should speak to?”

The following are some potential questions that can be asked during a Learning Conversation.

- What 2 gifts, talents or skills do you have that make you a valuable family member and friend?
- What 2 skills make you especially good at your paid or volunteer work?
- What talent do you have that not many people know about?
- What is something that you love to do so much that you get lost in it for hours without getting board?
- What are your 2-3 favorite hobbies?
- What are your gifts, capacities & skills you are willing to contribute?
- What do you care about? (Issues and concerns you want to work on?)
- Concerns? What should we do that you would work on?
- What associations and institutions do you have strong relationships with?
- What would your possible roles be?
- Who else do you know we should contact?

Learning Conversations - Exercise

Form pairs. Have a fifteen minute one-to-one conversation to discover the other person's gifts and what they really care about. For five minutes let one person be the asker and then switch roles. For the final five minutes reflect on what it felt like to conduct a learning conversation.

Potential Discussion Questions

- What was it like to ask another person about what was really important to her or him?
- What was it like to be asked about what was really important to you?
- How did you recognize real "motivation to act" rather than just "opinion"?
- How could you see using these kinds of learning conversations to discover what people care about – enough to act?
- People may not care about what those with a particular agenda want them to care about