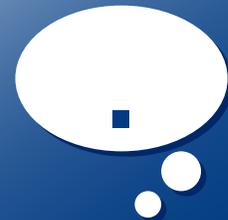


# Having the Normalcy Conversation: Sample Agenda



## Introduction

While States have begun implementing the provisions of Public Law (P.L.) 113–183, it is imperative that they also continue to review and refine processes to confirm they are doing what the law specifies and then make adjustments to processes as needed. This Sample Agenda is intended to be used with the “Having the Normalcy Conversation” guide. It is intended to support child welfare professionals in facilitating normalcy conversations—that is, structured discussions and planning sessions among key stakeholders on how to promote normal and developmentally appropriate experiences for youth in foster care.

Because concepts like “normalcy” and “developmentally appropriate”<sup>1</sup> often come with values and beliefs attached, these conversations—though extremely important—may not always be easy. The goal of the conversation is to change the power dynamic between caregivers and youth in care and address some topics that might be sensitive (e.g., appearance, values, sexuality).

As facilitators embark on the normalcy conversation, they may feel that implementing the provisions of P.L. 113–183 represents a change to culture and a loss of control for some of the stakeholders in the room. It is important to create an environment in which participants feel they can share their perspectives and experiences and challenge assumptions. Facilitators should be sensitive and responsive to those participants who may need additional time to process and integrate concepts. The material will be comfortable for some; for others, however, it represents new information and may challenge their current practice.

<sup>1</sup> “Normalcy” refers to allowing youth in out-of-home care to experience childhood and adolescence in ways similar to their peers not in foster care. “Developmentally appropriate” refers to basing practices and choices on what is known about brain development at various stages of a child’s growth, as well as an individual assessment of a particular child’s strengths and needs.

## Facilitating an Inclusive Discussion

Choosing the right person to facilitate the normalcy conversation is as important as inviting the right stakeholders. The facilitator should be engaging and able to maintain a supportive environment for all involved. An effective facilitator will have enough information about normalcy and the topics involved in these meetings to move the conversation along; however, he or she should avoid influencing the group based on a personal agenda. Finally, the facilitator should not, because of his or her position (i.e., supervisor, director, or key decision-maker), become a barrier to open communication.

An important step in creating a safe environment is to develop a set of ground rules on which the group can agree. This is best accomplished by asking participants what they might need from others to feel comfortable to actively engage in this conversation. The facilitator should record responses during the discussion, asking for clarification if necessary to ensure everyone is clear on the ground rules. For example, a participant may say everyone should “respect each other.” The facilitator could then ask the participant to identify behaviors that would show respect to the group (e.g., listening, speaking one at a time, limiting side conversations). If the group is slow to get started, the facilitator may provide some suggested ground rules. These might include that all participants:

- ▶ Listen and hear what is being said
- ▶ Be open to others’ ideas and remember that everyone has a portion of the truth
- ▶ Challenge old ideas and behaviors with kindness
- ▶ Should not feel pressured to engage in every conversation; while the conversation will benefit from input from the entire group, it is fine to pass and simply take in what others are saying
- ▶ Be willing to step outside of their comfort zones
- ▶ Ask questions for clarification
- ▶ Consider the impact of what they and others in the room are sharing about personal experiences and how that information adds to understanding and moves the field forward
- ▶ Keep conversations on track and avoid getting pulled into individual issues

The facilitator should post the completed ground rules in a prominent location in the room. If things get contentious during the day, the facilitator, or any participant, can refer the group back to the ground rules and remind everyone of his or her commitment to creating a safe environment for all.

## Provide Opportunities to Form Connections

The facilitator should make sure to provide opportunities for stakeholders to learn about each other’s areas of expertise and role as it relates to normalcy. He or she should ensure that all stakeholders have a voice and feel that their role is important—this will help stakeholders feel more connected to the common goals.

## Key Stakeholders

Facilitating normalcy conversations among multiple stakeholders at the State and local levels promotes collective action and consistent implementation of both normalcy and the reasonable and prudent parent standard (RPPS). For additional information, see the “Having the Normalcy Conversation” guide (pages 5–7). Facilitators should ensure that youth and young adults are at the table and fully prepared and supported to engage in the conversation. Facilitators should also make sure to plan time for a formal debrief of the participants following the event.

## Plan for Sufficient Time

Facilitators should try to plan for a full-day meeting in order to have a comprehensive two-way conversation. However, this can sometimes be difficult, so if a half-day meeting is the only possible option, an abbreviated agenda is provided below.

Mirroring the White House Convening, child welfare agencies are encouraged to organize normalcy conversations among a broad array of State stakeholders (see below). These stakeholders should understand how the shift to normalcy will affect their work and how it can better support positive outcomes for children and youth.

# SAMPLE AGENDA – FULL DAY

## 8:30–8:45—Welcome and Introductions

## 8:45–9:00—Setting Ground Rules

## 9:00–10:00—Stakeholder Overviews

## 10:00–10:30—Networking Break

*It is helpful to provide instructions to help structure the networking break. For example, facilitators should provide a discussion question prior to the break and direct the group to discuss the question with participants whom they might not know well. These discussions may be held in pairs or in small groups. Participants should be asked to report their findings. Keep the question simple; it should spark about 15 minutes of conversation. Topics may include:*

- ▶ Legislation on normalcy and the RPPS
- ▶ Defining “normalcy” and its importance for children and youth in foster care
- ▶ Obstacles to normalcy and strategies for overcoming them

## 10:30–11:15—Defining Normalcy

## 11:15–12:00—Supporting the Normalcy Conversation

*Presentations and/or discussions should focus on one or several of the following topics that are most relevant to normalcy for the State hosting the meeting: child and adolescent development, brain development, trauma, culturally and developmentally appropriate activities, identity formation, liability, training, and/or cross-system supports.*

## 12:00–1:00—Lunch

*It may be tempting to schedule a working lunch. However, it is highly recommended that the group be encouraged to take at least a 30-minute break from the conversation. This will allow time for participants to attend to issues away from the training, recharge for the afternoon, and come back ready to be actively and fully engaged for the remainder of the meeting.*

## 1:00–2:00—Working Session: Developing a Shared Vision of Normalcy

## 2:00–2:30—Networking Break

## 2:30–3:30—Breakouts

*Topics for these breakout sessions should be determined by local issues regarding the implementation of normalcy provisions. Topics may include:*

- ▶ How to create a unified vision so that the RPPS best serves children, youth, and young adults in the foster care system
- ▶ What training and support systems the child welfare workforce (i.e., caseworkers) needs in order to support the youth in care and to continue to support those over age 18
- ▶ What training and support systems the caregiver workforce (foster parents, youth workers) needs in order to support the youth in care and to continue to support those over age 18
- ▶ How to resolve conflict regarding what is in the best interests of young people (e.g., a young person disagrees with the decision being made on their behalf)

*To support rich dialogue, the facilitator should work to ensure all stakeholders are distributed evenly throughout all groups and should plan to have sufficient youth and family representation.*

## 3:30–4:30—Next Steps: A Strategic Action Plan for Implementing Normalcy

*Develop a strategic action plan for implementing the stakeholders' vision of normalcy.*

## 4:30–5:00—Closing

# SAMPLE AGENDA – HALF DAY

○ 8:30–8:45—Welcome and Introductions

○ 8:45–9:00—Setting Ground Rules

○ 9:00–9:45—Defining Normalcy

*To make most efficient use of the shortened timeframe you should consider providing some pretraining information, possibly in a webinar format. This pretraining work will allow the group time to have a more productive discussion on how to move these ideas forward. Topics may include:*

- ▶ Legislation on normalcy and the RPPS
- ▶ Defining “normalcy” and its importance for children and youth in foster care
- ▶ Obstacles to normalcy and strategies for overcoming them

○ 9:45–10:00—Networking Break

○ 10:00–11:00—Supporting the Normalcy Conversation

*The abbreviated timeframe does not have to mean getting less information from the group. The facilitator should consider structuring this part of the event to maximize group input. Using a facilitation model such as World Café (<http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/world-cafe-method/>) will help get targeted information from participants in a shorter time.*

*Presentations and/or discussions should focus on one or several of the following topics that are most relevant to normalcy for the State hosting the meeting: child and adolescent development, brain development, trauma, culturally and developmentally appropriate activities, identity formation, liability, training, and/or cross-system supports.*

11:00–12:00—Working Session: Developing a Shared Vision of Normalcy

○ 12:00–12:30—Closing

