

Inspiration and Upskilling: Conversation starters

An informal activity to help parents and students discuss skills and careers options with support from school/college

Activity objectives

- To help parents and students openly discuss interests, skills and careers options.
- To help parents share and reflect on their experience and feel confident that their experiences can be of value to their child.
- To help parents support their child in understanding their abilities and skills and explore how to develop themselves and their self-belief.
- To encourage parents to visit the parents' hub and use the online conversation starter game at home.

How to use it

- Can be used as part of the series of Inspiration and upskilling events as a targeted intervention with the same families.
- With a maximum of 15 families, selected with similar needs or shared experiences, e.g. EAL, SEND.
- Can be used as tool for working with disengaged parents – who might be less likely to go on the Talking Futures parents' hub independently.
- Could be combined with other parental engagement events to kick off discussions and add interactivity.

Delivery time

 45 minutes

Need to know

- To view the conversation starters, this activity requires parents to go online to the [parents' hub](#) or to have the question prompts printed out.
- In the Delivery steps, you can find several different ways to run this activity, depending on the needs of families.
- This activity is for parents and children to attend together.
- This activity works best delivered face to face.

Links to parental engagement recommendations

- Create a parent-friendly environment.
- Build trust with socially-disadvantaged families.
- Stimulate family conversations.
- Draw on parents as a resource.

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Preparing the session with parents in mind

Content & format

- Determine the delivery method (see Delivery steps) that will best suit the families you are trying to engage.
- Make the environment as parent-friendly as possible:
 - Set up the space with tables, where each family can collaborate on the challenge or multiple families can work together.
 - Serve snacks to make the event more appealing to families and encourage an informal atmosphere.
 - Consider using parent, older student or alumni volunteers to support each family if you are in person and working with specific groups such as EAL or SEND. The volunteer can help them understand the activity, ask questions and draw out key discussion points.
 - Copies of the [Family action plan](#) could be provided to prompt parents to write down any family research actions to follow up on.
- This activity asks a lot from parents. Consider in advance with other staff attending how you will respond to challenging situations that may come up, such as:
 - Parents being too nervous to engage.
 - Parents saying they do not work/ have not ever worked so they can't answer the questions.
 - Parents not wanting to listen to their children or dismissing their answers.
 - Children not wanting to listen to their parents or value their experiences.
- If you're running the activity virtually, you may want to invite a small number of families and send out sets of printed conversation starter cards to families who might struggle to access them on the parents' hub.

Communication

- This should be an invitation-only event for specific families. You may want to invite the whole household, including grandparents and younger and older siblings, to ensure families feel comfortable attending.
- If this is the first of a series of events with the same families, explain this in your invitation. You could set mini family learning challenges in between events to encourage skills development to continue at home, and feedback on these could be shared at the next event.
- Emphasise the fun, informal nature of the event to reduce concerns from disengaged parents or those who have negative associations with coming into school/college.
- The topic of careers conversations could be promoted beyond the event to reinforce the learning for attendees and open it up to the whole parent community. For example, set one conversation starter per week for families to discuss at home via your newsletter or social media.


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Delivery steps

Step	Activity	Time
1.	<p>Start with a short overview about the importance of ongoing conversations in careers decision-making. Remind parents how valuable their experiences are and how they can share them with their children – you could show this film to bring this to life. Reassure families that even if they do not usually chat much about careers and options, this is chance to get support with those conversations so they can hold more discussions at home.</p>	10 minutes
2.	<p>Families go through the parent-facing and student-facing conversation starters. There are a variety of ways the conversation starters can be used, depending on the needs of the families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For families with lower literacy levels or EAL, deliver the activity as a closely-guided session to ensure they feel supported and are able to access the content. The facilitator can pick conversation starters that are suitable for the group and read them out loud, encouraging families to answer the question and discuss together if they feel confident doing so. If the event is virtual, attendees can be muted whilst they discuss the questions as a family, then feed back on their conversation to the group if appropriate. The facilitator could ask questions to help families feed back to the group e.g. “Did anything surprise you about what you discussed?”, “Is there anything you would want to find out more about?” Families able to work independently can select their own conversation starters and discuss whichever topics come up. If they are working with physical cards, the cards can be shuffled and placed faced down on the table. If they are doing the activity online, they could scroll through the question screens and randomly select the order in which they answer the questions. Some families might benefit from a more collaborative approach and the support of other parents. They could be seated at group tables – with careful attention paid to ensure that families grouped would not make each other feel uncomfortable. Each family picks a card or selects one question on their screen and asks the question to the family next to them. Both families can contribute, so the students benefit from a broader range of insights. Depending on staff/family numbers these table discussions could be held in breakout rooms using an online platform with a member of staff supporting each group. <p>Whilst families are working through the questions, the facilitator can encourage them to identify topics they haven’t discussed before and signpost them to where they can find more information.</p>	25 minutes

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Delivery steps

Step	Activity	Time
3.	At the end of the activity, signpost parents to the Talking Futures parents' hub and show them how to find further resources, including the conversation starters, so they can discuss the questions at home and see if their child's answers change over time. Encourage families to use the Family action plan to capture their next steps, for example, researching more information on apprenticeships, getting a better understanding of what the school/college offers, etc.	 10 minutes

Learning from the event

- Allow time at the end of the event for families to chat to staff on an informal basis. As well as providing an opportunity for feedback, this could encourage conversations to continue beyond the event and build relationships with parents and encourage them to attend other engagement activities.
- You may want to follow up with each family after the event to see if they have held any career conversations since attending and discuss what they plan to do next. You can also signpost them to tools such as the [Family action plan](#), where they can record the steps they are going to take to support their child's decision-making, and find out if they need any other support.
- You may also want to survey attendees to establish their engagement with the event, particularly if it is part of a package of interventions with the same parents and students. Example questions and a survey template are available [here](#).
- To gain a deeper understanding, evaluate the event within the context of your wider careers provision, both from the perspective of students and parents – guidance on doing this is included [here](#).



Feedback

Take part in our parental engagement project by providing valuable feedback on this resource by completing this [short survey](#)