



## Using Dialogue (not Discussion) to Manage Your Mental Models

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One way to manage your mental models is to use dialogue, rather than discussion. How are they different?

<b>Discussion</b>	<b>vs</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
<b>In a Discussion ...</b>		<b>In a Dialogue ...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The solution has been defined</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You engage the group in defining the challenge and best possible outcome</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You present your idea for all to analyze and discuss</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You engage everyone in contributing ideas and exploring all ideas together</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You stress your idea clearly and with passion</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Everyone suspends their assumptions</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You try to build support for your idea so that it “wins”</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No one tries to win - everyone learns, defines, and creates</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is how most people communicate</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is less common but more is achieved as everyone works together and contributes to the outcome and the idea</li></ul>

### **An example of using dialogue instead of discussion:**

Imagine you believe that “parents are not as engaged as they should be in their children’s education.” Your mental model is that parents do not know how to support their child’s education...and why should they? Unlike you, they do not have the education needed to teach young children, they only know their child. You have so much experience working with children! So, you decide to conduct a “parent education” program. Can you identify all of the mental models that led to that decision?



What would it look like if you started the conversation, not with a solution (parent education), but with questions:

How do we understand parent engagement?

Does it need to be supported?

What would be different in our agency if parents were more engaged?

What do we know from the parents' perspective?

What do they think of us?

What is our current relationship with them?

How important is their relationship with us?

Are we satisfied with the current "relationship"?

How are our relationship with parents, and their engagement in their child's education related?

What might we do to strengthen the relationship?

Each question allows us to look at the challenge through a different lens. Through dialogue, a solution will emerge and then the conversation can shift to discussion, with everyone on the same page. The result is that mental models (maybe even yours!) have shifted through the process and a new, shared solution has been discovered and allowed to emerge!