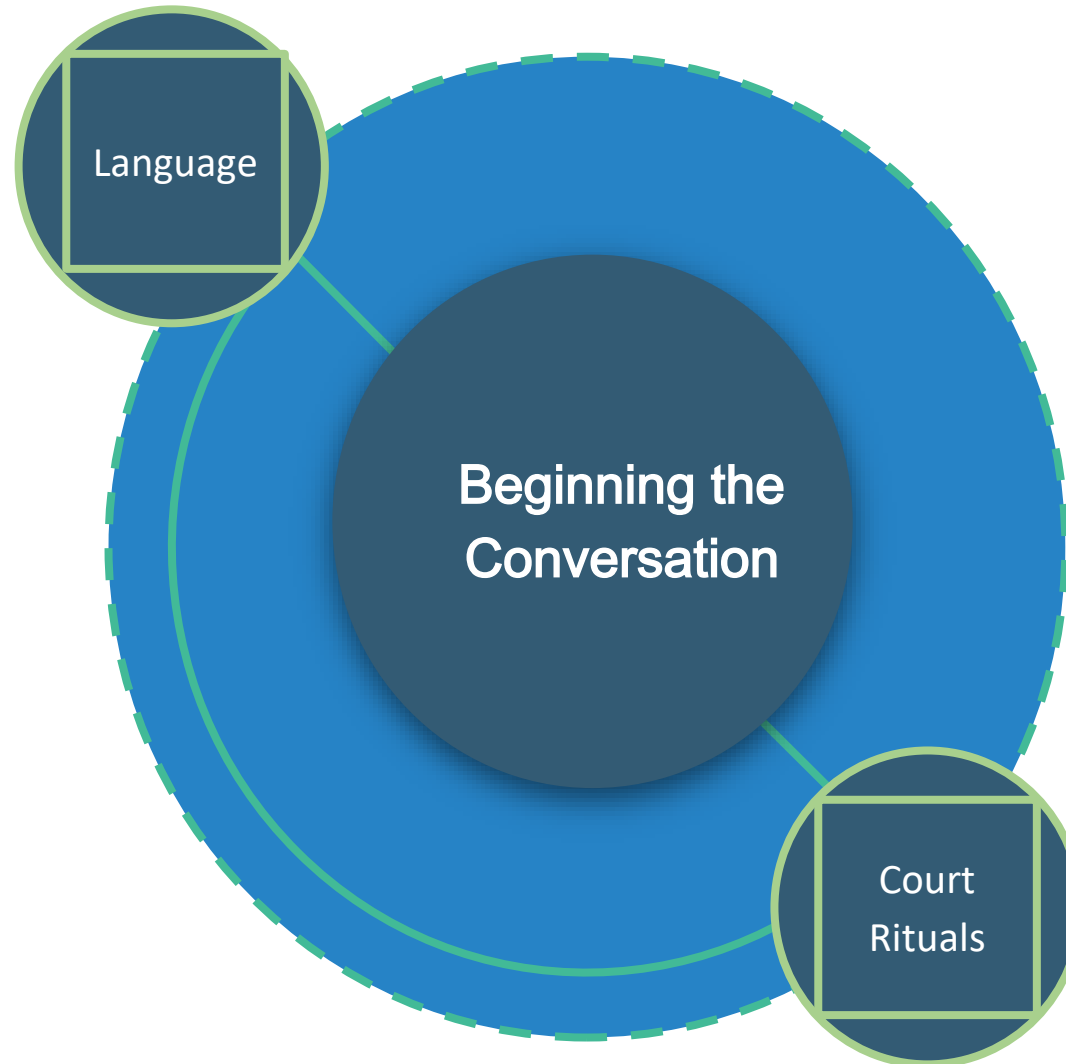


Beginning the Conversation



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Harmful Language

Client labels based on role:

Mother

Father

Child

Half-sibling

Birth Parent

Why is it Harmful?

Client labels that emphasize a general role rather than a specific family allows court actors to distance themselves from the actual individualized family before them.

How to Interrupt

SPEAK UP. Each family member has a name and when we use it, we force the court actors to see this family as a connected group of family members:



“Mother” → Ms. Diaz, Juan’s mother

“Father” → Mr. Smith, Kayla’s father

“Child” → 8-year-old Kelvin

“Half-sibling” → 7-year-old sister

“Birth mother” → Mother

Harmful Language

Client labels based on non-performance:

Non-compliant with service plan

Missed X visits

Refuses to participate

Why is it Harmful?

Focuses on individual blame for why things didn't happen as the system expected. Assumes that there is only one way to do things and the system knows best what that is. Also focused on negative, not what the parent is doing right.

How to Interrupt

SPEAK UP. If your client doesn't agree with a service, explain why. When something doesn't happen, shift from individual blame to a holistic understanding of the systemic barriers that contributed to the result:



Mr. Smith attended 4 out of 5 visits
brought food, games, and love

Mr. Smith has to take 2 buses to
come to the isolated industrial
park where visitation is
offered

Harmful Language

Client labels based on non-performance:

Unable to provide...

Unsustainable...

Unable to support family...

Why is it Harmful?

These labels show no hope for future, no hope in supporting family to keep entire unit together. This language adds to our clients feeling there is no way out but to give up.

How to Interrupt



Speak Up: With proper supports/tools set in place and an opportunity to be connected to appropriate community supports, client is capable of becoming sustainable, holding job, supporting family, etc.

Ritual that is Harmful

Court actors refer to attorney by their surname but refer to clients by their role:

Attorney Ruiz
vs.
Mother

Why is it Harmful?

This type of disparate use of names creates an implicit environment of “othering” reinforcing that our clients are outsiders, not worthy of being called individually by name

How to Interrupt

SPEAK UP. Everyone has a last name, so equalize the power dynamics by referring to everyone using their surnames:



Attorney Ruiz

Ms. Brown, Dante's mother

Ritual that is Harmful

Everyone in court talks about the family except the family

Why is it Harmful?

This reinforces the power dynamic between court actors and the parent. It disempowers the parent to have to listen to others talk about their family's private info and not have a say

How to Interrupt

SPEAK UP. Prepare with your client in advance a piece of what you would report that the parent can take charge of and hear their voice in the courtroom, talking about their family

Ritual that is Harmful

Court schedule is always rigid, parent/child schedule is always flexible

Why is it Harmful?

It's pervasive myth that the court schedule must be rigid while the parent/child schedules are always flexible. This belief takes kids out of school and parents out of work, it destabilizes the family unit so the court can be

How to Interrupt

SPEAK UP. Your client's schedule matters. Educate the court about what the client misses when they attend court on the court's schedule.



Is it a school-based/filed case? Have it heard after school or on school vacation weeks

Does the client have to work on weekdays? Argue for zoom or for a specific time when client has a lunch break