A GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS & SUPPORTERS

Spark the Conversation

Stay warm, stay neutral. Listen more than you talk.

Helpful tips: If you ask a question, count slowly to ten before jumping in. Silence is not defiance — it is space to think. Let them find their words. If at first it doesn't go well, regroup and try again later.

OPENING MOVES Checking In — Gently

- "I've noticed X. I just wanted to check in."
- "How are you managing through all this?"
- "Is there something else going on that's making this feel even harder?"
- "Can you help me understand how this feels for you?"

REFLECTIVE LISTENING Mirror What They Said

- What I heard you say is X, Y, Z — do I have that right?"
- That sounds really hard. Am I right that you're feeling X?"
- "What is it about this situation that makes you feel so X?" (use their word)

HOLDING SPACE Keep the Space Open

- "What do you need from me right now?"
- "What can I do to be helpful?"
- "How can I support you in this?"
- "Thanks for sharing this with me."

SELF-REMINDERS Reminders to Yourself

- No lectures. No fixing. Just listen.
- Give them space to answer all questions - including their own.
- Phone calls & car rides can be great listening spaces — no eye contact required.
- Seeds of safety take time to sprout. Days. Weeks. That's okay..
- You don't have to have all the answers; it is good, honest modeling that you don't

WHEN THINGS GET TENSE If the Convo Gets Hard

- You're allowed to feel anxious, too.
- Notice if you're getting heated — that's your cue to pause, take a break, not exit.
- A bathroom break is a fair reset. Run your hands under cold water. Deep breaths. Peek at this sheet. Come back.
- You're modeling that humans don't always get it right the first time — and that's okay.

RECOVERY When You Misstep — Reset Phrases

- "I blew that. Can I rephrase?"
- "I didn't say that well — let me try again."
- "Can we try this again? I want to get it right."
- "I'm getting a little anxious — I just need a moment."
- "I really want to have this conversation. Can we try again when we are calmer."
- "I'm not showing up the way I'd like to right now."