

# We make schools better

Making connections that help our kids

15 April 2023



# Who we are



## **PASADENA EDUCATION NETWORK**

We are an independent non-profit parent network that promotes family participation in public education for the benefit of all students in the area served by PUSD.



**FAMILY & COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT**  
PASADENA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

The vision of the Family and Community Engagement Department is to build a sustainable, intentional and systemic partnership of educators, families, and community members to support our students' development, educational attainment and success in school and life.

# Agenda

**Finding our people** *Let's get to know each other!*

**The art of asking questions** *There are no stupid questions, but knowing who, when, and how to ask – and how to follow up – is the key to getting answers that make a difference!*

**Getting from REACTION to ACTION**

*Strategies for better communication, problem-solving and creative solutions*

# Our Goal...

...is for you to come away energized, empowered, and ready to be part of a diverse community of parents whose engagement helps our kids (and schools) succeed.

## We're going to talk about:

1. Why expanding our “comfort zone” and getting to know each other is so important
2. How to ask questions that help us learn and do better by our own student and all students
3. Three basic strategies & one guiding principle that help us move beyond reaction toward constructive action that leads to creative solutions

# Let's get to know each other "Bingo" !Vamos a conocernos! "Lotería"



# “Finding our people” & expanding our sense of community

- We're more likely to approach people we believe we have the most in common with
- Ice breakers can be used intentionally to initiate interactions between people who might not otherwise seek each other out.
- Even simple ice breaker exercises can help people discover things they may not have realized they had in common, as well as unique things each person brings to the community.
- Activities that rely more on doing than on talking can help people from different backgrounds bond and enjoy a sense of shared purpose that can extend beyond the activity.

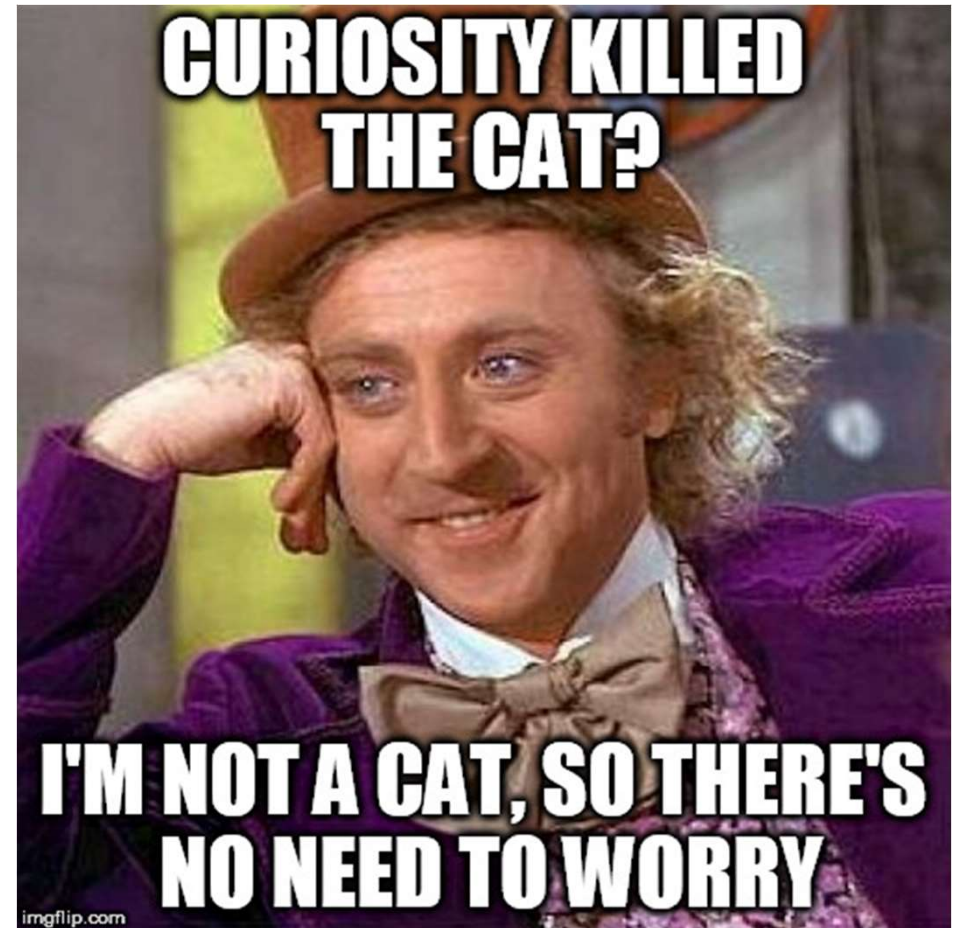
# The Art of Asking QUESTIONS...





Many of us are **afraid to ask questions**- maybe we were raised to not ask, are afraid to sound dumb, uneducated, or annoying.

Some of us don't have a problem asking questions but we **may not know the right way to do it** - and if we are not answered, or get a negative response to our questions, or are told that this is not the time or place to ask, we may not want to do it again.





# Knowing where to start...

For most concerns related to our child's learning or well-being at school, the teacher is the best person to approach first.

- You do not have to wait for Back To School Night or Parent Teacher Conferences to meet with your child's teacher!
- Email or send a written note or message the teacher on Canvas
- You may call the school office to schedule a time to talk with your child's teacher, either at the school or by telephone.
- If you need help with translation, the community assistant can help
- When you call the school's main number, there is an option for Spanish.

**PROBLEM-SOLVING GUIDE:** who to contact first and where to go next

**Why not go straight to the top? (a few reasons!)**

# Get to know your Community Assistant

A Community Assistant is available at your school site to help parents, families, and community members with their immediate needs and/or services, such as:

- Liaison between the school and the parent/families for any school site concern
- Helping navigate your school's processes and procedures
- Arranging conferences between parents and school personnel
- Assisting families with any personal or academic concerns
  - Refers them to community agencies and resources
- Assisting with parent meetings and advisory councils
- Assisting in recruiting and organizing volunteers
- Providing assistance with parent portal

Community Assistants host parent workshops on various topics such as:

- Technology- Computer Training
- Parent and Teen Communication
- Social-Emotional growth
- Healthy Minds and Healthy Body
- Positive Parenting
- IEP 101
- How to help our children handle stress and anxiety
- Managing screen time



# How to ask your question effectively!

There are no “stupid” questions, but *how* you ask can make a big difference!

**Be clear about what it is you hope to learn or get from someone.** *If the person you approach is not someone who can give you the information or help you need, ask to be directed to the person who can.*

**Try to approach people in a positive way.** *If the person you approach feels attacked or blamed or simply overwhelmed by your anger or frustration, they may get defensive and not be able to focus as well on getting your problem resolved.*

**Give some context, but start with the question before getting into details.** *In general, keep your message (spoken or written) short, clear, and to the point. Give the other person a chance to engage; you can always provide more information or context if they ask for it or don't seem to understand the situation.*

**Take notes!** *At the end of the conversation, you can review the main “take-aways” to be sure that you and the person you're engaging with have a common understanding, including any next steps that you or they will take.*

# Activity

# Asking questions in a meeting...

- **Informal Meetings**- when you're called on (you've raised your hand); or if really informal and small any time that feels right
- **Formal Meetings**-  
School level- ELAC, PTA, SSC; District Level (DELAC, CAC, LCAP PAC) & Board Meetings
  - Public Comment (can make a comment or ask a question on any topic, usually at the beginning of the meeting- watch the time- they'll tell you whether you have 1, 2 or 3 minutes)
  - On the agendized item (when specifically allowed- usually written on the agenda; raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged)
  - Parking lot (at end of meetings)
  - Anytime on CHAT during virtual meetings, but try to keep it to the topic at hand

# HOW to ask questions in meetings...

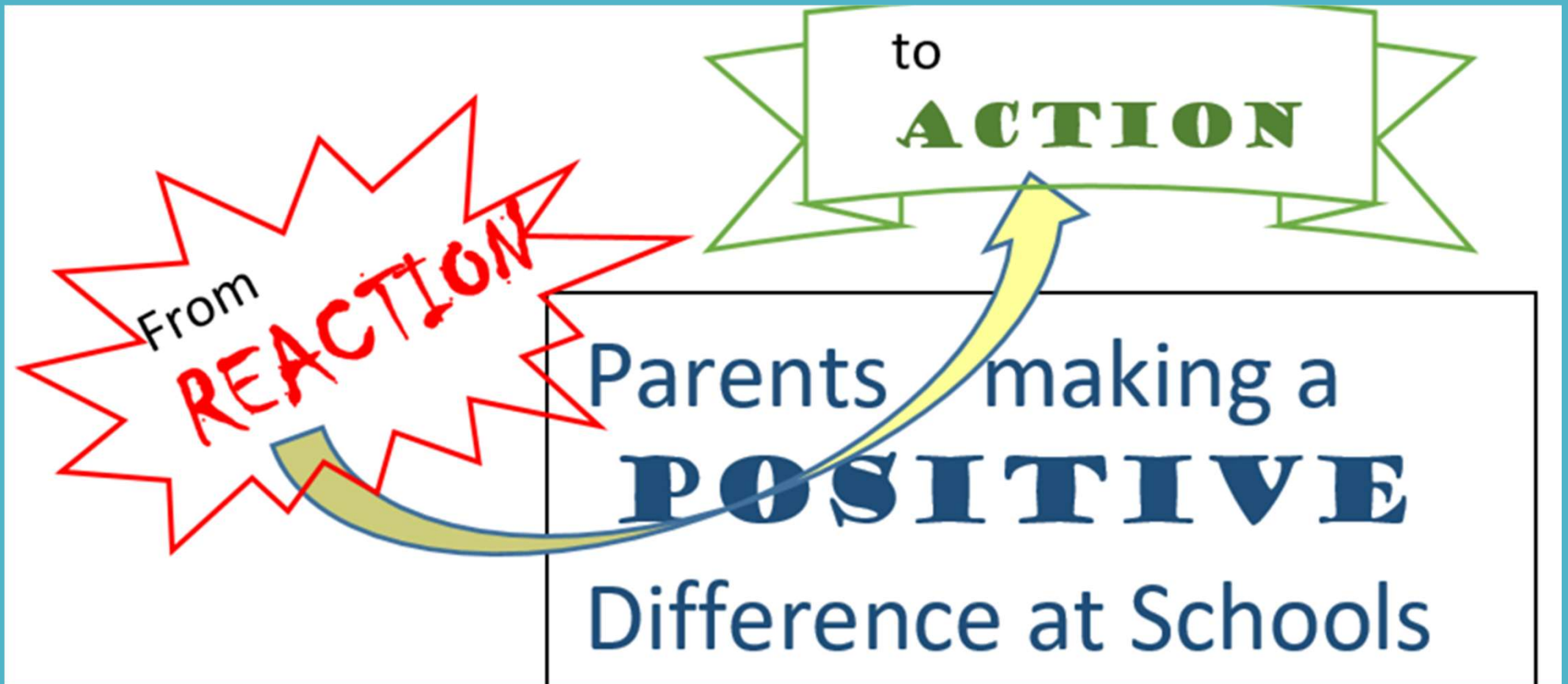
- *Take a breath and pat yourself on the back for being brave*
- Be **prepared**- Take notes on what you want to say
- Know what you hope to **accomplish**
- Watch your **tone** - seek to maintain or build rapport
- Keep in mind the time available, and purpose of the meeting
- Provide **BRIEF context** if necessary
- If the question is very sensitive or the response may require preparation ahead of time, **send ahead of time**. If not able to do that, acknowledge that you don't expect a full answer NOW, but would like it answered by next meeting

# Pro-tips...

When you are trying to resolve a more complex problem or address a systemic issue:

- Figure out who can help address the issue and schedule a time to meet or talk.
- Let the person know ahead of time what you are hoping to get from the meeting, so that they can prepare.
- Take notes and review what was agreed upon and who will do what next (and by what date!)
- If you need to go “up the chain of command” to resolve something, keep a record of emails sent and received.
- For issues that affect more than a few students, gather others’ testimony (to document the issue) and ideas (or desired outcomes).





<https://youtu.be/yF6hq3cqxl>

# REACTIONS



Venting /  
Ranting



Accusing  
or  
Blaming



Getting  
Depressed



# REACTIO

... is EMOTIONAL **N**  
... is based on UNTESTED ASSUMPTIONS  
... generates MORE REACTIONS  
... is not very productive  
(and can sometimes be destructive)

*... often does **NOT** lead to positive solutions*

# ACTION

... is THOUGHTFUL  
... requires being OPEN-MINDED  
... ENGAGES OTHERS  
... is CREATIVE

**... leads to SOLUTIONS**

## 3 Basic Strategies

Ask  
Questions

Reflect

Engage

## 1 Guiding Principle:

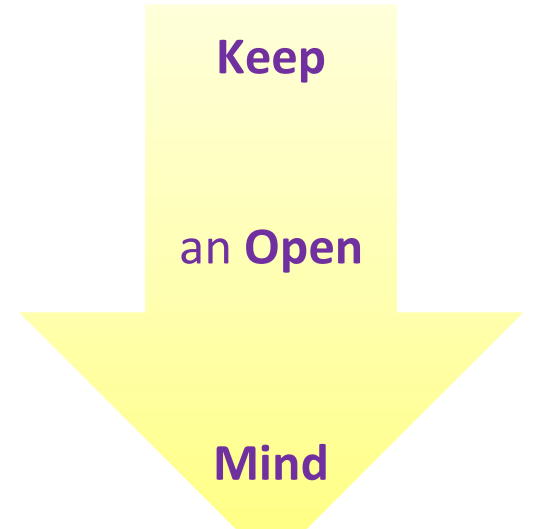
Keep

an Open

Mind



“A kid pushed me down and took the ball away!”



Maybe you and Gus should be more careful...

Scenario #1:

“...Gus and I both ran for the ball and he bumped into me and I fell down and he got the ball!”

- Ask with *curiosity*

“How did it happen?”



Cookies & milk and we're done!



“How did it happen?”



Scenario #2:

*“...This big kid came and pushed me and took the ball for him and his friends to play with.”*

more questions!

- Do you know this kid?
- Why do you think he pushed you?
- What were you (and others) doing before this happened?
- What happened after you fell down?



## Reflect



- **What is important to me – for my child?**

*I want him to be safe at school.*

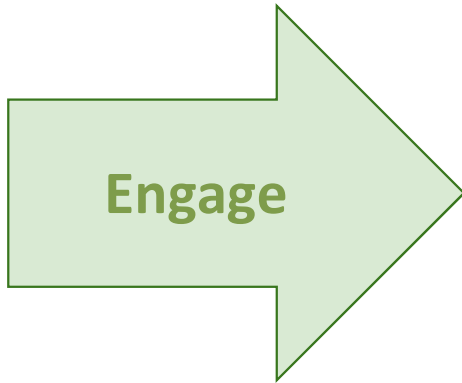
- **Is this part of a larger problem, or just a one-time incident?**

*Who is this “big kid”?*

*Is his behavior typical?*

*How does the school handle this kind of situation?*

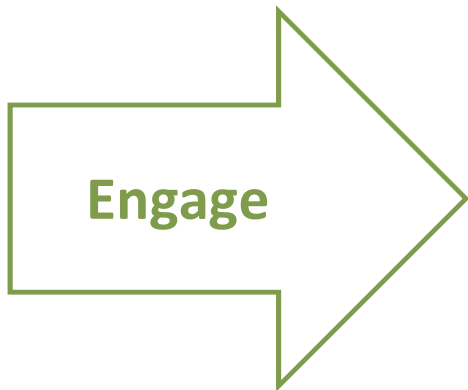




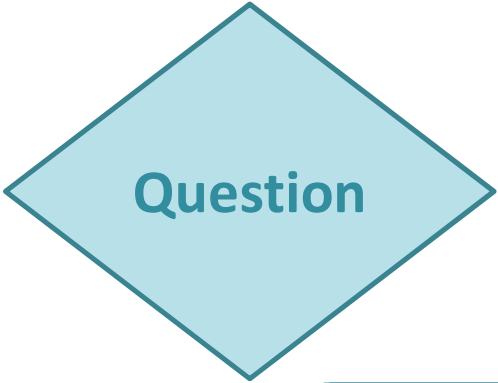
### ➤ Who should I talk to first?

Start with someone close to the incident who might know more about what happened.

- *Who supervises during recess? Noon aide? Teacher?*
- *Where can I find this person?*
- *How should I begin the conversation?*



*"My son told me a big kid pushed him down yesterday. Did you see what happened?"*

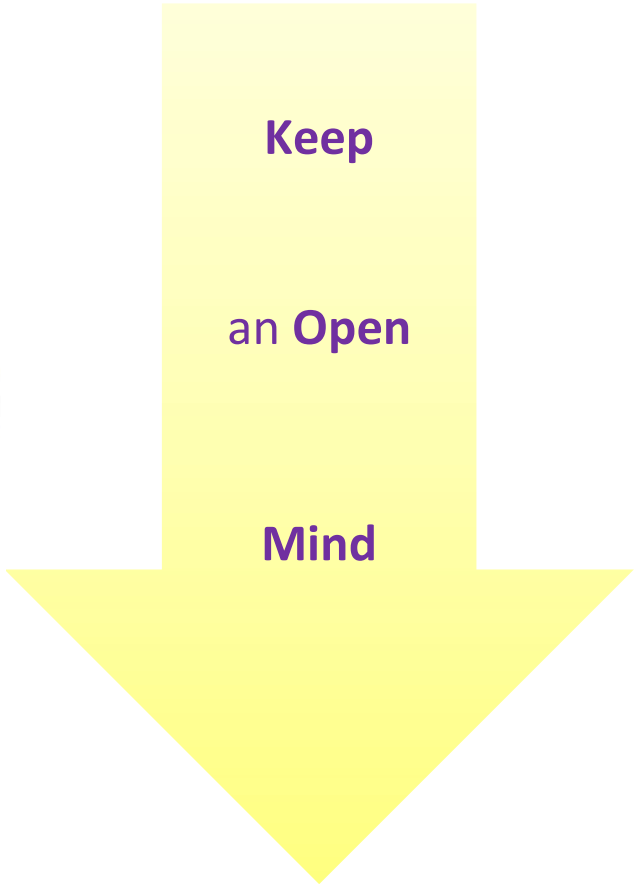


It was the 3<sup>rd</sup> graders' turn to use the balls. Sometimes the younger kids get out to recess earlier and grab all the equipment, and the big kids get mad.

...So you let a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader knock my son down just because it wasn't his grade's turn to use the ball?

That's not OK!

I can't believe there aren't enough balls for each grade to have their own.



# REACTION



*She thinks it's MY fault!  
It was her son's fault!  
I'm just one person –  
how am I supposed to  
keep all these kids under  
control? What a  
troublemaker...*

*... often does NOT lead to  
positive solutions*

- Assume positive intent
- Look for common ground

## Engage Others

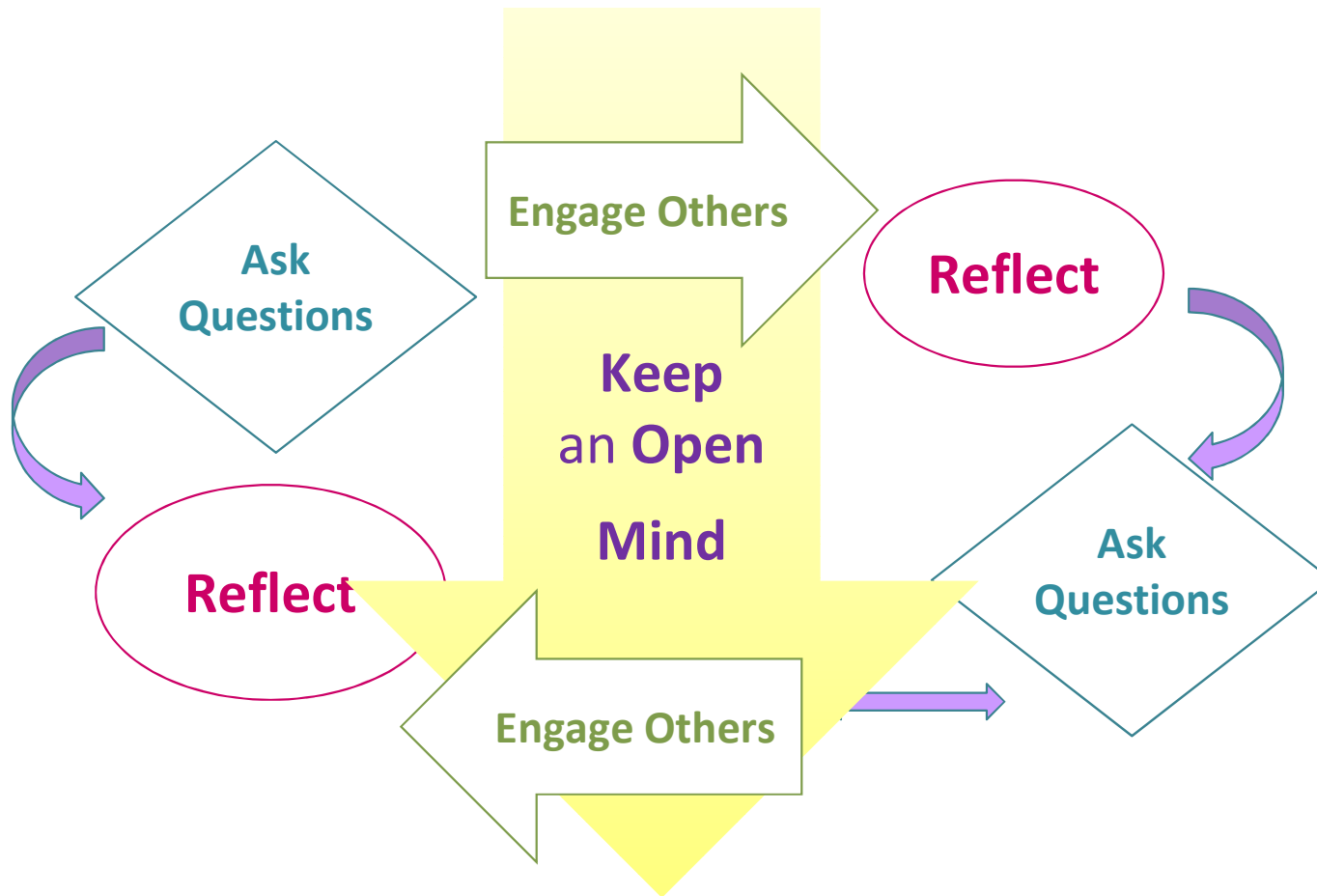
- Approach others as potential partners



*"I know that you want the children to be safe during recess."*



*What do you think WE could do to try to make sure things like this don't happen?*



## Ask Questions

- What do you think would help the children play more safely together?

*Keep an open mind  
about the problem and  
what a solution  
– or solutions –  
might look like .*

## Reflect



The noon aide says there aren't enough balls.  
She also said it's hard for one adult to supervise the entire play area.

## Engage Others



- Maybe the PTA could raise some money to buy more balls.
- Could we organize some parent volunteers to help supervise?



# Quiz time!

<i>What are the 3 basic strategies?</i>	<i>What do you remember about this strategy?</i>
<b>Ask Questions</b>	Ask with curiosity – don't assume you already know the answer
<b>Reflect</b>	What is important to me? Is this part of a larger problem (pattern, system)? Who should I speak with first?
<b>Engage Others</b>	Start close, work up and outward How should I open the conversation? Assume positive intent Look for common ground Approach people as potential partners
<b>Keep an OPEN MIND</b>	About other people, about what the "problem" is, and about what the solution or solutions might look like

Try it out!

# We become leaders when...

**We show up and offer to help**

*... and figure out how to make ourselves useful or invite others to join us*

**When we ask questions about how things work**

*... and then others look to us for answers or a better understanding*

**We see a problem or get an idea**

*... and connect with others to figure out a solution*

**We advocate not only for what our own child needs**

*... but for other children and families with similar needs*

**We practice empathy and respect for others**

*... including those with whom we may disagree*