

Words Matter — Quick Guide for Child Support Leaders

Shared Meaning • Clear, Inclusive & Respectful Communication • Practical Scripts

Active Listening (Do this every time)

- Attend: pause typing, remove distractions
- Paraphrase facts: “What I’m hearing is...”
- Reflect feeling: “It sounds frustrating/urgent.”
- Clarify before advising (one focused question)
- Summarize + teach-back: “Next step is X by Friday—did I get that right?”

Shared Meaning (What & Why)

- Definition: mutual understanding of goals, roles, terms, context
- Why: fewer escalations, consistent service, faster outcomes
- Use the frame: Why → What → How → When → Who → Help

7 C’s Checklist (Quality Gate)

- Clarity — plain words; one idea/sentence
- Conciseness — cut filler; keep essentials
- Concreteness — examples, numbers, formats
- Correctness — accurate terms; verify facts
- Coherence — same story across channels
- Completeness — purpose, action, owner, deadline, help
- Courtesy/Consideration — respectful, audience-centered

Clarifying Questions (Starters)

- Facts: “When you say documents, do you mean last 30 days of pay stubs?”
- Definitions: “What does compliance mean here—payment, upload, or both?”
- Scope: “Is this about this case or policy in general?”
- Constraints: “What might get in the way, and how can we remove it?”
- Commitment: “So X by Friday—does that feel doable?”

Rituals That Keep Meaning Tight

- Weekly huddles with a 1-page brief for changes
- Playback/teach-back in meetings (“How will we explain this to a parent?”)
- Artifact spot-checks: letters, texts, scripts use the same terms
- Single source of truth (version-stamped brief + owner)

Vague → Precise (Transformers)

- Vague: “Submit income ASAP.”
- Precise: “Upload last 30 days of pay stubs (all pages) as one PDF by Fri, Oct 10; portal → Upload; need help? reply ‘HELP’.”
- Swap ASAP/soon → a date/time; “documents” → exact items; define acronyms

Use this guide to engineer shared meaning.

Small wording changes → big outcome gains.