

PAUSE: Navigating Challenging Wish Situations

Wish experiences are meaningful and exciting, but they don't always go as planned. Unexpected changes, strong emotions, or difficult conversations can leave you wondering what to do next. You don't have to have all the answers. PAUSE is a framework for understanding the situation, responding within your role and knowing when to involve Make-A-Wish staff. PAUSE isn't about finding the "perfect" response. It's a tool for using good judgment when a situation doesn't have an obvious answer.

Pause- Create Space to Respond Intentionally

Challenging situations can move quickly. An immediate response isn't always the best response. Give yourself a moment to consider what you see and hear before deciding how to proceed. Taking a moment allows you to respond thoughtfully rather than reacting to the pressure of the moment.

Consider: *What is happening? What do I need to understand before responding?*

Assess- Consider the Situation from Multiple Perspectives

Listen to what the wish child and family are communicating and consider the circumstances surrounding the concern. You may not have the full picture yet. Gathering context can help you determine what the situation needs and whether it is something you can address directly.

Consider: *What is being communicated? What may be contributing to this? Is there information I don't have yet?*

Understand Your Role- Know What You Can Do and When to Partner with Staff

Volunteers play an important role in creating meaningful wish experiences, but not every situation requires a volunteer to take the lead. Understanding your role allows you to support the wish child and family confidently while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

Consider: *Is this within my role? Am I being asked to make a decision or commitment I am not authorized to make? When in doubt, always escalate to staff.*

Support the Wish Child- Keep the Wish Child's Experience and Wellbeing at the Center

Consider what the wish child needs from the adults around them. Support may mean listening, offering reassurance, providing space, helping them feel heard, advocating for their needs or simply remaining calm and present.

Consider: *What does the wish child need right now? How can I help preserve their dignity and sense of involvement?*

Escalate When Needed- Know When Additional Support is Appropriate

Some situations are best addressed in partnership with Make-A-Wish staff. Reach out when a concern falls outside your role, involves a significant change or expectation, raises a safety or wellbeing concern, or requires additional guidance.

Consider: *Would involving staff provide additional support, clarity, or expertise? When in doubt, always escalate to staff.*

PAUSE in Action

Example 1: When a Family Isn't Responding

The scenario: You've been assigned a Wish Discovery, but the family hasn't responded or hasn't committed to a date.

Pause: Consider the situation before assuming the family is uninterested or unwilling to participate. Families may have competing schedules, communication preferences, or other circumstances affecting their ability to respond.

Assess: Think about the communication you've already attempted and whether you've given the family different ways to connect.

Understand Your Role: Volunteers should make at least three attempts using different methods of communication within 30 days of the assignment. Consider phone calls, texts, and emails to reach out.

Supporting the Wish Child: Remember that the goal is to create an opportunity for the wish child to share what matters to them. A little flexibility and persistence can help make that opportunity possible.

Escalate When Needed: You don't have to continue pursuing the family indefinitely. Staff will check in with you after two weeks and again after 30 days. If you've made the requested attempts and are still having trouble connecting, let staff know and we'll take it from there. You did your part. Reaching out for staff support is the next step, not a sign that you haven't done enough.

Example 2: When a Wish Doesn't Seem to Reflect the Child's Own Voice

The scenario: During a Wish Discovery conversation, you notice that someone other than the wish child seems to be strongly influencing the conversation or speaking for the child.

Pause: Take a moment to notice what is happening without making assumptions about the family's intentions.

Assess: Listen for the wish child's own interests, preferences, reactions, and ideas. Consider whether there are opportunities for the child to participate in the conversation in a way that works for them.

Understand Your Role: You can help create space for the wish child's voice without feeling responsible for controlling the conversation. Your role is not to determine whether a family member is "too involved."

Supporting the Wish Child: When appropriate, gently redirect the conversation toward the wish child. You may say: "I'd love to hear what (wish kid) thinks about that," or "What are some things (wish kid) really enjoys?" If you are comfortable redirecting, go for it. A simple question can sometimes create the space the child needs to share. If redirecting the conversation doesn't feel comfortable or isn't effective, that's okay too. Document the wish ideas discussed in your paperwork and share your observations and concerns with staff.

Escalate When Needed: Let staff know if you have concerns about the wish being influenced by someone other than the wish child. You don't have to flip the script. Your ability to notice, document, and communicate a concern is valuable even when you're not able to change the direction of the conversation yourself.