

HOW TO STOP AVOIDING THE DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

People often avoid difficult conversations out of fear. Fear of one's inability to control emotions, fear of being unable to gain the other person's trust, fear of the other person taking the conversation poorly, fear of hurting feelings or relationships or fear of being wrong.

How to overcome fear

The single best way to overcome the fear of engaging in a difficult conversation is by *reversing your thinking*.

Consider the risk of not speaking up. What would be the outcome if you chose not to address the issue? What would be the potential damage to the relationship if you allowed the situation to continue as is?

Think about your situation, and consider the risk of not speaking up. How bad could it get?

Compare that to the possible outcomes of having the conversation. Shape your thinking to "What can I do to resolve the issue AND strengthen the relationship?" and then think about the best possible outcome of having the conversation:

This way of thinking is similar to a common practice in mediation, called BATNA/WATNA, which stands for *Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement* and *Worst Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement*. This is a practice where participants in a mediation think up the best and worst possible outcomes not requiring agreement from the other person. It is used to help move negotiations forward. In the case of difficult conversations, this way of thinking can help spur you into action.