

6 TIPS FOR HAVING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Whether it's sharing bad news with a client, providing corrective action, or talking with a colleague about an uncomfortable issue, difficult conversations often take a large mental and emotional toll on all involved. Here are some strategies to help make these conversations easy and productive.

PRACTICE UNIFIED DETACHMENT

Rather than one person working against the other, this approach focuses on reframing the issue so that both people work collaboratively to find a solution. For example, when a teacher is discussing a student's poor behaviour with the parent, it can be easy for them to blame each other. By recognizing that both the teacher and the parent want the student to behave so they can get the most out of their education, it becomes easier for them to work together.

DON'T TRY TO "WIN" THE CONVERSATION

Your goal is to share the information or to solve the problem. Both outcomes require both parties to work together. Trying to "win" turns the conversation into an argument and leaves you in a position where nothing gets positively resolved.

HELP THE OTHER PARTY FEEL SAFE

Reassure them of what your intentions are and be sure to maintain a respectful approach. This also means being aware of your triggers and how emotionally involved you are - that way you can better moderate your reactions.

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ASK YOURSELF WHY YOU ARE HAVING THE CONVERSATION

What outcome are you after? What do you want to accomplish? By focusing on how you want the relationship to look after the difficult conversation, you can maintain direction and focus during the exchange.

REMEMBER TO GET CURIOUS

Think about your attitude and preconceptions about the person you are dealing with and about the situation. Could they be colouring your approach? Be aware of your feelings and don't let them control your behaviour or reactions when entering into the conversation.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME & PLACE TO HAVE THE CONVERSATION

If possible, give the person you are talking to advance notice that there will be a conversation taking place. This will help them prepare, and increases the chances that the discussion will be productive. Choosing a neutral location to meet often helps facilitate an open discussion while meeting in your office can create an additional power imbalance.