

Difficult Conversations Checklist

Start by analyzing the Three Conversations

1. Sort out **What Happened**
 - Where does your story come from (information, experience, norms)? Where does their story come from?
 - What impact has this situation had on you? How can I better understand their intentions? Look for positive intent from their side.
 - What have you contributed to the problem?
2. Understand **Feelings**
 - Explore the bundle of emotions you are experiencing.
3. Ground your **Identity**
 - What do you need to understand and accept to ground yourself in advance of this difficult conversation?

Check your purposes and decide whether to raise the issue

1. **Purposes:** What do you hope to accomplish by having this conversation? Shift your stance to support learning, sharing, and problem-solving.
2. **Deciding:** Is raising the issue the best way to address the issue and achieve your purposes? Can you affect the problem by changing your contributions? If you choose not to raise it, negotiate with yourself on why and how to let it go.

Start from the Third Story (i.e., what a neutral observer would see)

1. Describe the problem as the **difference** between your stories. Include both viewpoints as a legitimate part of the discussion.
2. Share your **purposes**.
3. **Invite** them to join you as a *partner* in resolution to sort out the situation together.

Explore their story and yours

1. **Listen to understand** their perspective on what happened. Negotiate with yourself to be curious. Ask questions. Acknowledge the feelings behind the arguments and accusations. Summarize the conversation to see if you understand.

2. **Share your viewpoint**, your past experiences, intentions, and feelings.
3. **Reframe** to keep on track. Shift from truth to perceptions, blame to contribution, and accusations to feelings.
4. Work to be **Descriptive** vs. **Prescriptive** when sharing your experiences.

Engage in Problem-Solving

1. Think through your and their **Interests** (needs and goals) in advance.
2. Invent **Options** that meet each side's concerns and interests.
3. Look to **Standards** for what should happen for your working relationship and the outcome.
4. Discuss how to keep **Communication** open as you go forward.