



# HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Difficult conversations are an inevitable aspect of individuals' personal and professional life. Recognizing the importance of having difficult conversations is crucial to fostering healthy communication and building strong connections. Below are a few steps to ensuring a productive and positive conversation on difficult topics:

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## 1

### Prepare for the conversation

- Self-reflect and take the time to identify and manage your emotions.
- Approach the conversation with a calm and open mindset.
- Identify your personal goals for the conversation. Clarify what you hope to achieve.
- Enter the conversation with empathy. You should seek to understand the other person's point of view; as opposed to trying to convince them of your perspective.

## 2

### Create the right environment

- Select an environment that is neutral, comfortable, and conducive to open communication. This will help ensure that both parties feel at ease.
- Keep in mind the amount of privacy and distractions. Ensuring a quiet and interruption-free environment allows for a more focused, meaningful, and effective discussion.
- Choose a time when both parties are calm and focused. This will contribute to a more productive exchange.

## 3

### Establish a framework for communication

- Provide specific details about the situation to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that both parties are on the same page.
- Set clear expectations or a framework for how the discussion will unfold. This clarity helps in managing each party's expectations and promotes a more focused and constructive dialogue.
- Foster an atmosphere that encourages openness and honesty. Emphasizing the importance of transparent communication sets the stage for a more authentic exchange of thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledge and maintain a mutual respect of each other's opinions to foster a collaborative and positive environment.



## 4

### Demonstrate active listening

- Dedicate your full attention to listening to what the other party is saying. Demonstrate genuine interest. Indicate that their thoughts and feelings are being acknowledged.
- Avoid interrupting. Allow others to finish their thoughts before jumping in.
- Practice non-judgmental listening (i.e., avoid judging what the person is saying even if you have a different point of view). Instead, focus on understanding their comments.
- Paraphrase and summarize what the other person has said to ensure a shared understanding of the information being communicated.
- Use positive nonverbal communication (e.g., posture, eye contact, facial expressions, etc.) which will show the other person you are paying attention.
- Try to make the other person more comfortable during the conversation.

## 5

### Leverage effective communication techniques

- Use "I" statements to demonstrate personal responsibility (e.g., "I feel.."). Express your thoughts and feelings without placing blame on the other party.
- Focus on addressing specific behaviors rather than personal traits. This will help minimize defensiveness resulting in a more solution-oriented conversation.
- Express feelings without assigning blame. Encourage the other party to share their perspective without fear of judgment.
- Ask open-ended questions instead of making assumptions. This will encourage the exploration of thoughts and feelings, and promote a deeper understanding of all perspectives.

## 6

### Seek solutions together

- Approach the conversation with a collaborative mindset.
- Work together to find solutions. Encourage mutual understanding and resolutions.
- Identify a common ground to help bridge differences and promote agreement. Finding shared interests can lead to more effective problem-solving.
- Encourage creativity in generating potential solutions to promote a constructive and forward-thinking approach.
- Brainstorm together to enhance the likelihood of finding mutually acceptable resolutions.



**Sources:**

- Choosing Therapy: <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/how-to-have-difficult-conversations/>
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