

# 6 TIPS FOR HAVING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Whether 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 participants. Here are some strategies to help you have these conversations.

This is an approach that focuses on reframing the problem or issue, so that instead of having one person working against the other, both work together against the problem. For example, when a teacher and a parent are discussing a student's poor behaviour, it can be really easy for each to blame the other. By remembering that both the teacher and the parent want the student to behave so she can get the most out of her education, it becomes easier for them to work together.

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.

Reassure them of what your intentions are and be sure you maintain a respectful approach. This also means being aware of how involved your emotions are and what your triggers are so that you can avoid them, or at least moderate them.

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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 conversation.

Think about your attitude and preconceptions about the person you are dealing with and about the situation. Could they be colouring your approach? Your feelings going in to a difficult conversation will exist - what matters is being aware of them and not letting them control your behaviour or your reactions.

Selecting a time that is not already emotionally charged will help facilitate the conversation. Give the person you are talking to advance notice (if possible) so they can prepare and you can increase your chance of having a productive discussion. Often, choosing a neutral place to meet can help facilitate open discussion - meeting in your office can create additional power imbalance, hindering the discussion.