

5 Top Tips For Difficult Conversations

Look after yourself before, during and after difficult conversations.

The better your mental health and wellbeing, the more able you will be to handle tough conversations before, during and after they arise. Don't forget the basics like staying hydrated, taking breaks, getting sufficient sleep, exercising regularly and eating healthily. Remember to do what makes you feel good and prioritise time for self-care so that you are better able to recognise and manage your emotional state. If you need a break during the conversation, don't be afraid to take time out. Additionally, make sure you take time to switch off and relax afterwards.

Be prepared.

Whilst you may not be able to pre-empt all difficult conversations, there are certain factors to consider to ensure you are prepared where possible. For example, are you aware of the organisation's policies and procedures? Does the conversation have a clear purpose and goal? Is there a plan/structure to follow? Have you collected the facts? Could you build your knowledge in the area? Have you considered various perspectives? Is the location appropriate? Finally, ensuring the organisational culture is open and honest will make difficult conversations easier.

Think about how you are communicating.

Paying attention to how, when and why we communicate can make a real difference in the effectiveness of such conversations, helping you to adopt an empathetic and centred approach. Try to make sure you are actively listening, have open body language, use appropriate questioning techniques and consider factors such as tone of voice and language used. For example don't make the conversation a personal attack or exaggerate the circumstances for effect, remain measured and keep it factual.

Be human.

You are not expected to be perfect, nor do you need to be. All you can do is try your best to manage the conversation effectively. Accept that vulnerability is ok and know where your responsibilities end. You do not have control over everything, especially the actions of other parties, so control what you can and approach difficult conversations as your authentic, human self. Remember that your viewpoint may not be obvious to the other person, so showing that understanding of both sides will help with a mutually agreeable resolution.

Embrace a positive mindset.

Firstly, let's stop labelling them as 'difficult conversations' as this automatically adds pressure and increases the likelihood of avoidance. Re-frame the conversation in your mind as an opportunity to improve the situation, whatever that might be. Try to get comfortable with differing opinions and recognise that a compromise will likely be the better outcome. These conversations need to be had so we need to stay positive, be confident and trust our abilities to hold them effectively. The only way to do this is to practice and learn.