



Session aims

- Understanding when and why you may need to have difficult or challenging conversations
- Preparing for a successful discussion: your approach
- Introducing a process for managing challenging conversations
- Recognising and reconsidering your default approach to dealing with difficult interpersonal situations

Difficult conversations: when and why?

- Problems with attendance, quality of work, behaviour towards you/colleagues/customers
- Different styles of management/work/communication
- Mismatched expectations
- Crossed lines: miscommunication
 leading to misunderstanding
- ?



"Work with me! Pleeeeeaze!"

Your approach

- Requires a different approach from that used in regular everyday conversations
- You may need to move out of your comfort zone by speaking in a more assertive or challenging manner than usual
- Be prepared to question your own views, assumptions, and feelings as this will help you to reach a satisfactory solution



Your preparation

- Take care to distinguish between opinions and facts
- Where relevant, check internal organisational policies on matters such as discipline, grievances and bullying, and use these as a guide
- Be ready to explore the other person's viewpoint through effective questioning skills
- Plan a basic structure e.g. CANDID or CEDAR
- Have alternatives to 'landmine language'
 - 'That's just typical of you!'; 'Calm down!'
 - 'You're being irrational!', 'You always/never...!'



CANDID approach to difficult conversations

1. **Compartmentalise** the message
2. **Ask** questions based on their response
3. **Normalise** the situation
4. **Discuss** the details factually and neutrally
5. **Incentivise** the outcome
6. **Disengage** from the discussion

Compartmentalise the message

- “What happened...?”
- How are you doing with...?
- Be specific and clear
- ✓ Allow the other person a chance to say how they see the situation

Ask questions based on their response

- Acknowledge and keep asking questions
 - That sounds as though....
 - Tell me a bit more about that
 - ✓ The other person can begin to focus on solving the problem

Normalise the situation

- Make reference to how this happens to others too
- Make it easier to talk about the situation:
 - *‘This might be the first time you’ve thought about...’*
 - ✓ Let them know you’re having the conversation to be helpful not hurtful



Discuss the details

- Keep this factual and neutral
- Reiterate the issue/behaviour you are not happy about
- “*What do you think?*”
- ✓ Don't go straight in with solutions
- ✓ make suggestions or requests – they may not have considered alternatives

Incentivise the outcome

- Describe what's in it for them – what's the benefit for changing?
- Use the 3-line message:
 - When.....happens
 - it means.....
 - I'd like to resolve this and that way you will be.....

Disengage from the discussion

- Reinforce a positive working relationship
- Acknowledge it was a difficult conversation
- Describe any follow up you want to have and schedule it
- Thank them



Discussion openers

- I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I've noticed _____ and I'd like to talk about this with you
- I think we have different perceptions about _____. I'd like to hear your thinking on this.
- I'd like to talk about _____. I think we may have different ideas about how to.....
- This is difficult for me to talk about and it maybe difficult to hear. Something I'm concerned about is.....

Skills practice

- Think of a difficult conversation you have had in the past OR one that you need to have soon that you consider will be difficult
- Take 15 minutes in pairs to skills practice using the formats discussed/ openers.
- De-brief on body language, tone of voice and verbal communication

To take away

- What is your default approach? Does it lead to fruitful conversations and satisfactory solutions?
- Preparation pays off; plan a suitable approach, time and venue.
- Remain calm and neutral, avoid confusing or explosive language.
- Practice makes difficult conversations easier.

