



How do I have difficult conversations?

Discussion Guide

Discuss

1. Reese states that there are three questions to ask ourselves before we enter a difficult conversations:
 - Is the challenge in communicating or understanding “what” the problem is?
 - Is the challenge in “how” I’m expressing or dealing with my feelings or the feelings of others?
 - Is the challenge in communicating “why” this matters to me, or understanding why it matters to others?

Reflect back on a difficult conversation you had (or avoided). Using these questions as a guide, what made the conversation difficult?

2. Consider the what, how, and why of difficult conversations. Which is the most challenging for you?
3. Reese concludes his discussion of difficult conversations with another question: *What must happen in the future for me to feel respect or fairness or inclusivity?* Thinking back on difficult conversations you’ve had or avoided, what was the outcome you needed? How did you communicate this in the conversation?

Practice

According to speaker, trainer, and conflict coach, Judy Ringer, the art of conversation can be acquired with continued practice. However, getting started can sometimes be the most difficult part. Here are some conversation openers that she recommends:

- I have something I’d like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I’d like to talk about _____ with you, but first I’d like to get your point of view.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If the person says, “Sure, let me get back to you,” follow up with him.

- 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 _____.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

Which of these conversation starters seems best for you?

Choose one of the scenarios below and, with a partner, practice initiating a difficult conversation.

- You need to approach someone you supervise about a decline in their work performance, but you're not sure if there are other things going on in their life.
- You want to approach your supervisor about a problem in the workplace, and you need their leadership to resolve it.
- You want to address an issue with a co-worker who frequently makes inappropriate comments.
- You want to clear the air with someone from another unit who supposedly shared misinformation about your department.
- You think you may have offended someone with something you said or did, and you want to repair the rift.

After practicing, share your thoughts on the process: Did you consider the what, how, and why as a part of the conversation? Did the conversation starter help you in framing your concerns? Were you able to state what you wanted as a desired outcome for the conversation?