



Difficult conversation planner



As a leader you often need to deliver unwelcome or unexpected messages. While this is never easy, understanding how to deliver these messages will help you maintain a positive and productive relationship with the person impacted.

Preparing for these conversations is central to achieving positive outcomes. **By thinking ahead, you can ensure that every part of the conversation is directed at those positive outcomes.**

When to use this tool

When you are planning to sit down and have a conversation with a team member, a patient or a member of the patient's family, knowing that the topic, the situation or the person's state of mind could make the discussion difficult.

What to do

1. Be clear about the objectives you have for the conversation and about what **each of you** will want to achieve.
2. Document your outcomes in the planner, then use the planner to **anticipate and plan**
 - how you will open the conversation
 - what messages you want to get across and the examples or evidence you will use to support those messages
 - how they will **react** to your messages and how you will **respond** to their reactions, including how you will respond to their **counter arguments** and how you will respond to the emotions that the conversation could stir up.
Refer to [Strategies for dealing with different responses](#) to help you think constructively about how you may need to respond.
 - what emotions the conversation could stir up and the emotions you need to show
3. Finally, think carefully about how you will close the conversation and where you both go from this point.

Tips

- Choose the time and place for the conversation carefully.
- Practice the conversation - at least in your head - and visualise a successful outcome.
- Be clear about your purpose, know and return to your purpose at difficult moments.
- Keep in mind that how you say what you are going to say is just as important as what you say.
- Acknowledge emotional energy - yours and theirs - and direct it towards a useful purpose. Don't ignore it.

Your outcomes	Their outcomes
What do you need to achieve from this meeting? How would you like the other person to go away feeling?	What might the other person be expecting from this meeting?
Conversation plan - Way in	
How will you open the conversation	
Communicating effectively	
What <i>messages</i> to you need to get across?	What <i>evidence/examples</i> do you have that will help you get the message across?
Anticipating reactions and responses - For help, refer to <i>Strategies for dealing with different responses</i>	
Their REACTIONS - What might their objectives be? What counter-arguments will they have?	Your RESPONSES - What counter arguments/ reactions do you have to their objections? How will you respond to their counter-arguments/reactions?
Anticipating emotional interactions - For help, refer to <i>Strategies for dealing with different responses</i>	
Theirs - What emotions or behaviours might they display?	Yours - What responses do you need to make to give the meeting its best chance of success?
Closing the conversation	Next steps
How will you close the conversation	What are the next steps



Strategies for dealing with different responses

Consider strategies for dealing with the emotions and behaviours that difficult conversations can trigger.

Behaviour	Strategies
<p>Person passively agrees to everything you say or decide</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow some time to develop a relaxed atmosphere. ■ Ensure that they do some of their own thinking. Question them on their thoughts, rationale or feelings. ■ Ask them for their own conclusions. ■ Don't be afraid of silence, give time to think. ■ State your rationale clearly and check their understanding. ■ Keep to the facts. ■ Actively seek and constructively include their comments.
<p>Person will not agree to evidence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ask for their reasons. ■ Listen with an open mind. ■ Acknowledge their right to a viewpoint. ■ Be determined about your facts. ■ Restate your decision. ■ Explore possibilities and potential.
<p>Person defends, blames or attacks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Listen. ■ Identify the source of frustration. ■ Don't defend, blame or attack in return. ■ Restate the objective of the interview. ■ Don't dismiss complaints but agree to discuss their implications at another time and close the meeting.
<p>Person is impatient or tries to side-track the meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clarify the agenda for the meeting. ■ Listen and note particular points to address later. ■ Don't get side-tracked yourself. ■ Refine choices or options. ■ Make a firm commitment to discuss the priority issue for the individual at a later date.
<p>Person talks too much</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Allow enough time. ■ Don't respond too quickly – allow them time to talk. ■ Restate the purpose of the meeting and the agenda. ■ Keep them to the agenda by referring to what they have said and asking relevant questions. ■ Narrow down choices and focus them.

