

Having Difficult Conversations

There comes a time in every relationship, whether it is with a partner, friend, family member, colleague, boss or academic staff member that you need to have a difficult conversation. It's a good idea that you put aside time for that conversation, free from interruptions and spend time preparing yourself for the conversation so that you can clearly communicate your needs. Here are a few tips you may want to follow:

Pre- conversation

Cool off and calm down before you have a conversation. If you have the conversation when you are angry your message may get lost in your anger and you won't get what you need from it.

Work out **what's important to you** and make some brief notes before you meet and have the conversation. When you are making these notes make sure you mention yourself and not the person you are conversing with or it may feel like an attack to them.

Don't make assumptions about how the other person feels or thinks about something.

During the conversation

Set **ground rules** for the conversation if it is particularly difficult. For example use timeouts when it's becoming too heated.

Active listening – you need to paraphrase what you hear from the other person and check that the meaning you are attributing to what they are saying is the message they intended to send.

Make **eye contact** – don't stare or intimidate with eye contact but don't look down or away too often either.

Express your views – don't be afraid to share your point of view and disagree. Just make sure that you can accept that it might be different from the other persons and that's ok.

Use I statements like "I feel hurt that you didn't ask if I wanted to come with you" instead of "You hurt my feelings, you never ask me what I want"

Understanding another point of view – try and put yourself in their shoes and remember that you each have different past experiences and backgrounds which means that the same situation may be interpreted very differently.

Be **specific** in negotiating and asking for the things you want. Don't just say "I want you to show me you love me" use "If you organised a surprise dinner that would show me you loved me"

Post conversation

Keep your end of the agreement and do what it is that you said you would do.

Reflect and review how the conversation went. Would you do anything different? What worked well?