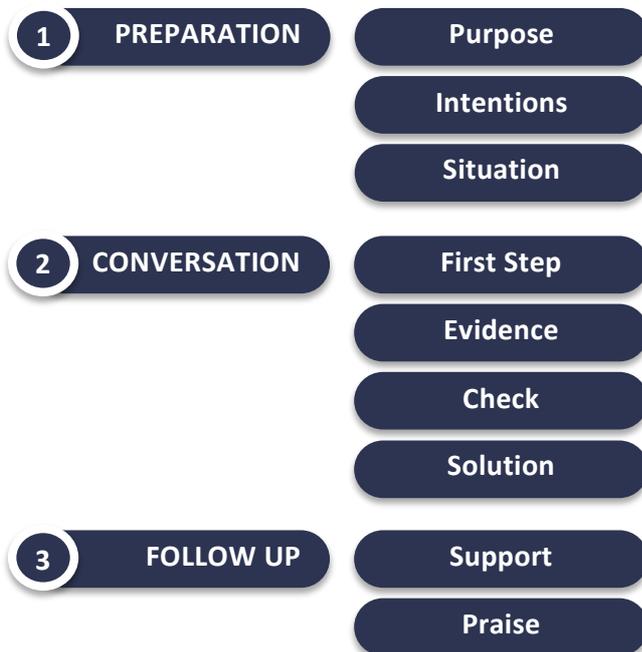


Difficult Conversations



Broaching a difficult subject with a colleague is often one of the tasks that causes the most anxiety in the professional workspace; whether it's challenging a receptionist's work attire, a locum's timeliness or a partner's disregard for admin procedures. However, with some thought and the application of some simple steps, both you and the person you are looking to "challenge" will have a positive experience you can both grow from. Here are some basic steps to help you to a positive resolution:



1. Preparation

Purpose: The first thing we need to be sure of is the purpose, what is it exactly we hope to accomplish? If it is just a winge, keep it to yourself, if there is a change in behavior, process or attitude you desire then be really clear with yourself what that is.

Intentions: The chances are that the person you are going to have the conversation with is not deliberately doing (or not doing) what they are doing deliberately to annoy you, they are probably unaware of what they are doing and almost certainly unaware of the impact it might be having. Enter this conversation with the mindset that they are well intentioned.

Also consider your intentions, are you doing this to have a dig or score points or are you doing this to help the individual and the practice grow and develop?



Situation: Before you go charging in, think about the how and where you are going to have the conversation. Obviously this is not a conversation to be had in public, so a quiet, uninterrupted space is important. Also think about timing, perhaps as they are rushing in through the door, late to might not get the best from either of you and asking them to come to your office at the end of the day might smack a little of school. Make sure the time and place are going to put both of you in the best environment to have a positive conversation.

2. Conversation

First Step: Opening the conversation is often the hardest step so plan it, script it, and practice it. Make sure it is clear, kind and to the point. For example:

“Hi Alex, I would like to discuss something that I think will help us work together better.”

“Lee, I would like to chat about how I have observed you greeting patients recently”

Evidence: Ensure you are using facts as part of your challenge and the more specific you can be the better the change of you both understanding the issue. So statements like: “you’re always late” are unspecific and unhelpful; however “I noticed you were 10 minutes late on Monday, Wednesday and Friday last week”

It is also key that you own the facts: “People are saying that you...” is not taking responsibility for the conversation.

Check: In the interests of fairness and truly understanding the entire situation it is important to check why; there might be reasons out of their control or perhaps a far more complicated explanation for the current situation. Ask:

“Is there any reason for this?”

“Is there something stopping you from catching the bus on time on those days?”

Impact: The next stage is to help your colleague understand the impact of their actions: “If you are late that means that it puts back our appointments by 10 minutes and that means that at least one of the other receptionists has to shorten their tea break.”

Solution: It is vital that you involve your colleague in creating a solution, as they will have more buy in to it if they had a role in conceiving it. Ask:

“What can we do to sort this out?”

“Do you have any ideas of how we can resolve this?”

Thank you

3. Follow Up

Support: Having agreed a solution it is important to support the actions and not just hope it will resolve itself or go away, ask:

“What can I do to help?”

“Who’s support do you need to make this happen?”

Praise: When you see a shift, acknowledge it, praise it and that will encourage your colleague to maintain the change:

“I notice that you were here early all last week, thank you, I really appreciate you making an effort.”

BE BRAVE, PREPARE AND GO FOR IT

Think about a conversation you have been putting off and before tackling it, fill in the worksheet attached to help you with your thinking.

Good luck!

Difficult Conversations Worksheet

Purpose

Write down exactly what you hope to accomplish by this conversation:

Intentions

What are the possible reasons that this is happening?

Situation

When and where are you going to have this conversation for maximum comfort and effect?

First Step

What is your opening line going to be?

Evidence

What are the facts around what you want changed?

Check

When and where are you going to have this conversation for maximum comfort and effect?

Solution

What is the question you are going to ask to illicit ideas for a solution?

Support

What help and support can you offer?

Who can help?

Praise

When is it appropriate to review and praise the positive change?

What might you say?

