

Difficult Conversations: Ground Rules

- ◆ **Remember that the other person can't read your mind.** It's important that you state very clearly how you see the situation.
- ◆ **Don't belittle the person.** Your tone should be firm and direct – but never talk down to the other person.
- ◆ **State the facts clearly and in as few words as possible.** Once you have stated the facts, don't dwell on them.
- ◆ **Frame your concerns in a positive way.** Don't dwell on the difficult person's behavior. Instead, focus on how he or she can improve.
- ◆ **Consider the other person's self-esteem.** Choose your words carefully. Write them down ahead of time. Think how you would feel if someone said the same words to you.
- ◆ **Have a clear game plan in mind.** After you have explained the problem to the person and told him or her exactly what you want, include how you are prepared to help – and spell out a time frame in which change has to occur.

8 Process Guidelines

1. Replace “but” with “and.”

“I agree with you but...” creates distrust and raises defenses. “And” leaves room for consideration of two points.

2. Use “I” statements.

“I believe...” is usually a more accurate and truthful statement than absolute statements such as “it is.” Don't attribute problems to others that are your own.

3. Don't disguise your opinions as questions.

“Don't you think that...?” creates a defensive reaction and push people into corners. Be honest about your opinion instead with an “I” statement.

4. Seek to understand before seeking to be understood.

Be able to restate in your own words what the previous speaker said through active listening. This makes sure you understand before you question.

5. Support your conclusions with data first, then emotions

Recognize the difference between logic and emotion. Pressing a point filled with emotion to make up for a lack of evidence will get you nowhere.

6. Be descriptive, not judgmental.

Instead of saying “John, you are lazy” say, “John, I noticed your last two assignments were late.”

7. Think creatively instead of critically.

When you think critically you are listening for conformity and it prevents you from hearing new and innovative ideas or solutions to a problem.

8. Accept responsibility for the content, process, and outcomes of every situation you are a part of.

Ask yourself, “How did I contribute to the situation?”