

Difficult Conversations

The key to any difficult conversation is understanding the profound impact relationship has on engaging in a helpful and meaningful exchange.

DO

01 Always let the other person (parent, teacher, colleague) bringing the issues forward—**speak first**.

02 Create a safe welcome space:

- Introduce yourself.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Never under-estimate the importance of a warm smile.
- Really listen and “check in.”
- Find a quiet space with no interruptions.
- Remove physical barriers like a table—sit in front of the desk.
- If you have a positive relationship, consider sitting beside the person (promote positive proximity).

03 Remember **we all bring a lot into the room** (our values, assumptions, bias). Before you even begin there could be a lot of anger, angst, worry, or concern.

04 **Validate, validate, validate**—“Thank you for____.” (Be specific.)

05 When you find yourself in unfamiliar, uncomfortable waters, **find a life raft** in advance—research/seek out information/others to learn.

06 **Accept that no one knows everything**—learn what you can but don’t burden yourself with guilt. Do what you can.

07 Recognize and admit **we are all afraid in stressful situations**, often including new or difficult situations. Remember the old adage “going to the principal office.”

08 **Stop the meeting** when safety (physical or emotional) is an issue for anyone.

09 **Prepare before:**

- Know your own triggers and have a plan of how you will deal with it.
- Set a structure/agenda—times, roles, topics.
- Have some “go to” questions or statements in case you feel stuck.
- Consider who should deliver the toughest message. Consider skill, role, relationship and comfort.



DON'T

01 Interrupt.

02 Forget **we all have feelings and reactions** and can be hurt-intentionally or unintentionally.

03 Put it off.

04 Forget how important empathy is.

05 Use **trigger words** or jargon like “bad” or “poor.”

06 Expect you can do it all—**we all have limits**.

07 **Assume you know the other persons’ experience** because you may have had a similar experience, event or conversation.

08 Assume you or other person might need support after your discussion—**check in and self-reflect honestly**.

09 Forget the things that bring you comfort.

10 Take things personally.

