

Difficult Conversations

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 **SWORPS**
Training

Difficult Conversation Topics

- Learn steps you can take to hold successful conversations
- Understand how to use dialogue to move your clients toward success
- Learn the importance of making the meeting safe



What makes a conversation difficult?

At least two are people involved

There are differing opinions/views

Emotions can run high

Physical Reactions

- Increased heart rate
- Increased respiration
- Sweating
- Fight or flight mode



What is Your Conversation?



Think back about a conversation
you have had that didn't go as
planned or one you are not having



What was the issue?



When did you realize it was going
wrong or why have you not held
that conversation?

Where to Begin to Have a Good Conversation?

- Reflect – on your last meeting or similar meeting.
- What was your role?
- Plan/prepare – write out questions, rehearse
- What went well, what did not?



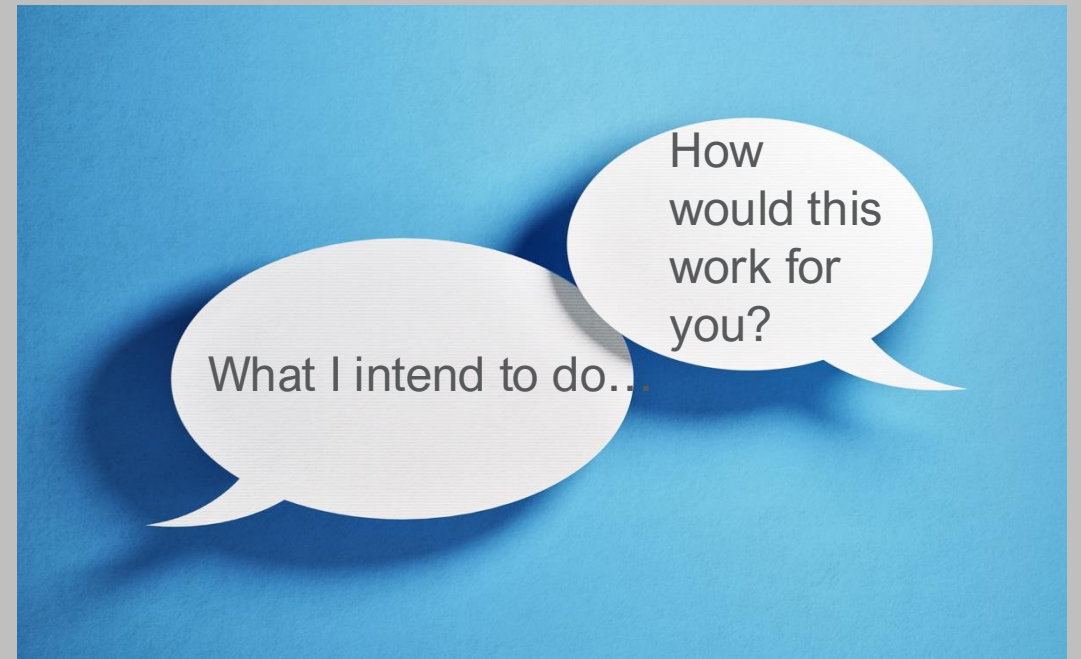
Meeting Space

- Privacy
- Comfort
- Seating arrangement
- Temperature



Starting the Conversation

- Share your good intent upfront
- Ask questions first – this puts you more in control
- Monitor your body language and theirs



Purpose of a Conversation/Dialogue

- Seek to understand by asking open-ended questions.
- Use the power of listening.
- Create a pathway (mutual purpose) to share, feel safe, and work together successfully.

Conversation vs Dialogue

Conversation

- **Informal:** Typically casual
- **Purpose:** Often social or sharing information
- **Structure:** Can be fragmented
- **Participants:** Usually involves two or more people.
- **Example:** Chatting with a friend about your day.

Dialogue

- **Formal:** More structured and purposeful.
- **Purpose:** Aimed at exploring ideas, resolving conflicts, or achieving mutual understanding.
- **Structure:** Focused and coherent
- **Participants:** Between two people or in a group setting.
- **Example:** A discussion between an advisor and a client/student.

More about Dialogue

- “A conversation with a center, not sides”
 - When two (or more) people think together.
 - Attempts to bring about change at the source of our thoughts and feelings rather than at the level of results our ways of thinking produce.
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- Source: Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together, William Isaacs.

Active vs Deep Listening

Active Listening

- Requires full concentration, understanding, and responding.
 - Paying attention
 - Reflecting
 - Non-verbal cues

Deep Listening

- Focuses on emotional and relational aspects of the conversation.
 - Empathy
 - Presence
 - Connection
 - Silence

Chat with Maria

- Maria is a 25-year-old new mother who recently gave birth to her first child. She is currently the sole provider for her family and has not had a lot of support from others, as her partner is either absent or unable to help financially.
- Before the pregnancy, she was enrolled in a part-time college program while working a full-time job. Her paid FMLA will be running out soon. Now, with the arrival of her baby, Maria feels overwhelmed by the pressure to go back to work and take care of her child, all while trying to figure out how to finish her education and move forward.
- She fears that if she doesn't go back to work and school soon, she won't be able to make ends meet for her baby. She's feeling a lot of guilt and stress about leaving her baby with someone else to return to work but feels trapped in her circumstances.

Chat with Maria Questions

In breakout rooms answer the following:

- What would you say to Maria about her feelings of guilt and stress about leaving her baby with someone else so she can return to work? Ask?
- How would you help Maria set priorities for reaching her goals? Ask?
- What skills would you use when talking with Maria?



Empathy

- How did you show empathy toward Maria?
- Did you use open ended questions to help the conversation more than closed questions?
- What non-verbal cues would you give to show empathy?

Helpful Hints About Conversations

- Paraphrasing
- Priming
- Watch for non-verbal communication



Safety

- **When** people do not feel safe sharing information or feelings with you, they:
 - Become defensive
 - Stop listening
 - Stop sharing
 - May end the meeting
- **Why** do people not feel safe?
 - Feel like they are being criticized
 - Feel you don't share the same purpose or goals
 - Feel like you don't share the same meaning about the situation

Some Default Reactions and Solutions

- Digging in....
 - Giving in...
 - Going silent
 - Lashing out
- Reach/find a mutual purpose
 - Agree to agree...say it out loud – they need to hear it – Agree to agree that you both want to find a solution ask why – ask about their purpose **first**
 - Find the “and” - “I hear you want to go back to school AND I want to make sure we get you there.”



Maria's Safety

- During the meeting, Maria gets very defensive and starts to leave the meeting.
- What do you do?
- Discuss in Breakout Rooms



Return to Safety

- Safety is eroded when your intent is misunderstood or miscommunicated.
- Safety is not so much about content but *intent*.
- State your intentions using contrasting statements.
- Do nothing for a few seconds to let both of you think about what is happening.



Use Contrasting Statements

- A don't/do Statement
 - Stop talking about content and talk about intent – using a contrasting statement
 - Clarify what you want for the conversation
 - Explain what you don't intend followed by what you do intend.
 - I didn't intend to..., I am not trying to...
 - I didn't intend to make you feel more overwhelmed. What I intended to do by suggesting some options was to let you think about them so we can discuss them later.

Back to Maria

- At your previous meeting, you suggested that Maria talk to her mother about keeping her baby.
- When Maria comes back for the next meeting, she gets angry and is frustrated and says the program isn't helping her and she feels you don't have her best interest at heart.
- What do you do?



Now its Time for Action!

- You have agreed on a mutual purpose and what is needed.
- Create an action plan.
- If you leave without an action plan, it was just a conversation.
- Even if you are done with the client, wrap up and agree that you don't need further meetings.

Reflecting

- You managed to get Maria to calm down and you agreed on some goals
- What now?
- Would you change how you interact with her in the future?
- Reflect on the meeting and your role.

What About Your Conversation?

- Think about the conversation you are NOT having or that didn't go well.
 - What is/was your purpose?
 - What is/was behind what you are advocating?
 - What do you think the other person's purpose is/was? What are/were their goals?
 - What can/could you agree on?

Skills Discussed Today

- Reflect and practice
- Plan
- Make the meeting environment safe
- Active listening and deep listening
- Conversation vs Dialogue
- Watch for safety
- Use contrasting statements
- Create a mutual purpose/pathway



What Now?

- For the next couple of months
 - Pick one or two of the skills and practice them every day.
 - When you feel comfortable with that, add another skill.
 - What will you try?



Questions?/Resources

- Crucial Conversations, 3rd Edition, Grenny, J., Patterson, K., McMillian, R., Switzler, A., Gregory, E. Published by: McGraw Hill, 2023.
- Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together, Isaacs, W., Published by: Doubleday, 1999.



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