



How To Handle Difficult Conversations

From time to time, all relationships face difficult conversations. There are times when we need to say something sensitive or even challenging to someone. It may be something which is upsetting us, a concern about their well-being, or something that's impacting our relationship with them. The problem is that the more important the message, or the closer we are to that person, the riskier it can feel to say what we need to say.

Humans are social beings. We want to stay connected with others. Deep down we have an innate fear of being 'cast out of the tribe'. This is one reason that we find it risky to communicate sensitive topics with people we care about – because deep down we fear losing them. Yet, if done in the right way, these deeper and more authentic conversations will bring you ever closer to someone.

Here are some tips to help you say what you need to say to those you love, in ways that are less risky, and more likely to have a positive outcome.

Choose The Best Method Of Communication

Think about the best way to convey what you want to say. Messages by digital devices such as DM's or email may seem quick and easy, but they can also be misread.

There's no tone of voice or body language in those types of messages, so the reader will put their own interpretation on it.

For example, how do you read the following:

'Why don't you come and visit?'

- It could be a suggestion, as in, ***'It would be nice to see you.'***
- Or it could be a complaint, as in, ***'You never come to see me!'***

So it's always a good idea to communicate about sensitive subjects in person. However, if emotions are running high, it may be better to first communicate via a message or email, and invite the person to have a conversation with you. Explain what you want to talk about clearly and ask them to suggest a suitable time.

Sandwich Your Feedback

Sandwiching feedback is a great way to minimise the impact of communicating sensitive messages. Basically, it works like this

1. State something positive that you admire or respect in the person
2. State the issue at hand, firmly.
3. Follow up with a positive statement about how taking on board the message will help your relationship.

Stay On Topic

Try to be as specific, concise and non-judgmental as possible; avoid using words and phrases such as:

Maybe, Perhaps, But, However, You always, You never, Why can't you

Prepare Ahead Of Time

Always let a person know that you want to discuss something sensitive before launching into it. You may have been thinking about this conversation for a while, but the other person may not be prepared for it at all.

Suddenly launching into it will not help matters and it's unfair on them.

So arrange the best time to discuss something, a time when both of you can focus and be prepared.

Phrases such as:

'I need to talk about something that's worrying me, is now a good time or could we set aside a time later?'

These types of openings work wonders in showing respect for the other person and being able to discuss the issue in a calm and positive manner.

Rehearse

There's a lot to be said for rehearsing a conversation before you have it. Rehearse the conversation over in your mind, or even place a cushion on a chair and imagine you are talking to the person.

As you rehearse, you'll be able to spot areas where your message needs to be made more clear. It will also highlight areas where your fears and worries are based on past issues rather than current ones so that you can separate these out in your mind.

If you're going to be speaking on the phone, write a list of the main points you want to make. Keep that list by you so that you can refer to it if emotions are running high. This will help you remain calm and focused on the issue at hand.

Be Kind and Empathise

Stay away from accusations. Accusations are direct attacks on the other person – all this will do is demotivate them.

No matter how much you disagree with another person's point of view, it is their point of view. Try to imagine what it is like to walk in their shoes, make it clear that you're willing to do so - before putting your own thoughts across.

Use phrases such as:

'We both have our own point of view and that is ok.'

'I accept that this is how you feel even though it is different to how I feel.'

Don't worry if those phrases sound strange or a bit wooden - they do work. Plus, you'll get better at them with practice.

Practise these tips and you'll find you get closer to the ones you love because now your relationship is based on authenticity.

That makes for an amazing connection in any type of relationship!

Marléne Rose Shaw ©

www.marleneroseshaw.com