

Navigating Difficult Conversations

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Kinds of Difficult Conversations

- Unsafe
- Uncomfortable
- Emotion-Driven (fear, anger, sadness, etc.)
- Conflict-laden

Think before you get on the road

- Where is the conversation happening?
 - Who has the “home advantage”?
 - What are your technology options?
- Who is involved in the conversation?
- What is your goal for the conversation or gathering?
- How will you navigate while driving? (tips & tricks)

Who is involved?

- People who will be present
- You and yourself
 - Avowed & ascribed identities
 - Your history & assumptions
 - Your “buttons,” fears, needs
- Roles people play

YOU	ELDERS
PARENTS	OTHER FAMILY
CHILDREN	FRIENDS & GUESTS

Navigating Difficult Conversations

What is your goal?

- Expectations & realities
 - Media portrayals of holiday gatherings
 - Social media reports from others
 - Reality
 - No gathering is ever ideal
 - No perfect solutions exist
- What is your goal?

Best practices in tough situations

- Remember that you can only control yourself (how you feel, what you say, how you behave)
- Acknowledge that what's upsetting to you about others can be reflective of what's upsetting to you about yourself
- Separate your position (on an issue) from your interests (in the moment)
- Separate what you observe (in a person's words or actions) from what you assume (in a person's feelings or motives)
- Know that you will never regret being your better self

Tips & tricks for conversation navigation

Internal tricks for you

- Depersonalize: (to yourself)
 - "This is not about me personally; this is about Person A and their B issue."
- Let it go: (to yourself)
 - "I am going to ignore that comment. I am going to take the high road."
- Empathize: (to yourself)
 - "Let me try to understand where they're coming from."
- Reflect: (to yourself)
 - "Why are those words/actions upsetting or hurtful to me?"
- Disengage: (to yourself)
 - "I am leaving this situation."

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Tips & tricks for conversation navigation

General

- Use “I” Statements:
 - “I feel/think ...” (tip: the word “you” should not be anywhere in this statement)
- Count to 10, then do it again

Neutral

- Set Ground Rules:
 - “Let's agree to not discuss X, to not interrupt, to not use bad words, etc.”
- Observe:
 - “It seems that we’re getting emotional/angry right now.”
- Accept & Dismiss:
 - “I’m sorry you feel that way” (then change the subject)

Warm

- Appreciate:
 - “I can understand why you may feel that way.”
- Acknowledge:
 - “This sounds really important to you.”
- Listen & Learn:
 - “I think I hear you saying XYZ; can you tell me why you feel that way?”

Cool

- Decline:
 - “I don’t want to discuss that right now.”
- Remove:
 - “Let’s talk about that outside/later.”
- Redirect:
 - “Speaking of A, what about B?”
- Disarm:
 - “I apologize for what I said last year about X; let’s move on.”

“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

Maya Angelou

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