



How to Approach Difficult Conversations with Others

Appreciating one another's differences makes for a better and more inclusive workplace, but conversations about these issues can be difficult. Here are tips to help you create a safe space to listen and share concerns.

Create Space and Listen: Take the time to listen to the concerns of friends, family and colleagues by asking questions like, "How are you feeling?" and "How can I help?" You can set the tone and acknowledge what has happened, and the need to talk about the issues, without needing to be the expert.

Demonstrate Humility: Present yourself as open-minded. Perspectives are shaped by life experiences and sometimes, we may need help to bridge the gap. Expand your views by connecting with someone who may have a different outlook. This can help open your mind to what others may be experiencing.

Share Your Commitment to Listen and Learn: You can set the tone for whether or not conversations around difficult topics are welcome. This is a chance to learn from others.

Encourage Healthy, Whole Living: It's important to emphasize the value of taking care of your body, mind and spirit to reduce stress. Encourage friends and co-workers to unplug and enjoy a brisk walk or get some exercise.

This Can Be Hard, and You May Feel Uncomfortable: That's OK. Remember to give yourself the same level of grace you provide others. Finally, remember to make space, keep an open heart and respond compassionately. This will help you provide support as a leader in your family or in your workplace.

Tips for Deeper Conversations

Need conversation starters? Here are some ways to begin:

- “Would you like to talk about the current events impacting our communities?”
- “How are the current events impacting you and your family?”
- “Do you feel comfortable being yourself?”
- “To what extent do you feel that you are embraced by others?”
- “Do you hide or downplay any aspect of your heritage, culture or religion because you feel uncomfortable sharing with others?”

Want to create a safe place for people to both listen and share concerns? Consider these steps as you begin the conversation:

- Have a positive outlook.
- Share “air time” to keep the lines of communication open.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- If you are offended or uncomfortable, say so and say why. It is OK to demonstrate empathy without attempting to “walk” in the other person’s shoes.

Demonstrate a deeper level of being present and really listen by using any of the following tips from a process called “Humble Inquiry”:

- Do less talking. Do more listening.
- Ask the right questions. Choose questions that will help build trust, and avoid questions that might put others down, such as leading or embarrassing questions.
- Ask for more information in the least biased and threatening way. Sample questions include: “What do you think about what is happening?” or “Can you provide an example?”
- Be aware that you and others can produce biases, perceptual distortions and inappropriate impulses. Genuine curiosity reduces the likelihood of misperception, bad judgment and inappropriate behavior.
- Ease up on your authority as a family or work leader to build stronger relationships with others.
- Do more self-reflection. Understand a situation and become more mindful of how words and deeds might impact others before jumping to conclusions.