

**DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS GUIDE**

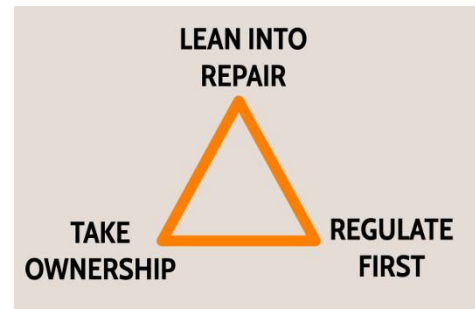
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DRAFT

This guide describes some principles and a practice model for difficult conversations. It overlaps with the Feedback guide. You might think of this guide's place is for when feedback or other communication gets messy.

**1.0 Guide overview**

This difficult conversations framework is grounded in the principles and practices of AR. It is an emerging more vulnerable, brave, curious approach to conflict. It is informed by the work of Stone, Patton and Heen, Sue Johnson, and the Gottmans. This guide is deliberately short, because we know that when things get messy, wordiness is the last thing we need.

**1.1 Principles****Lean into repair**

When either party notices, or a third party points out, a rupture, take steps to repair with the other person directly, in a timely manner.

Take the matter to a third party only to decompress and resource the repair.

Seek any required support for the actual conversation.

**Regulation comes first**

Only start the conversation when both parties are regulated.

If upset, allow at least 20min after the event to allow stress hormones to dissipate before proceeding.

If dysregulation shows up during the conversation, slow it down, or take a break.

Set a time limit. Many conflicts are not solvable in one bite (titration).

**Find a third chair perspective**

My chair, eg: "I prefer the dishes cleaned up straight away"

Their chair, eg: "You prefer to do them the next day"

Third chair, eg: "I prefer the dishes cleaned up straight away, while you prefer to do them the next day. This results in some friction"

Third chair, short form eg: "We have different approaches to timing around dishes"

**Own your experience, go underneath**

On top are the prominent judgement or blame structures eg: "You are always late"

Under that, the subtle interpretive "feelings" eg: "I'm feeling disrespected"

Under that, the noisy surface emotion: eg: "I feel frustrated"

Under that, the vulnerable primary emotion: eg: "I fear that i am not important to others"

**Basic structure**

Set context, eg: "I want to keep things clear, because this relationship is important to me"

Vulnerable reveal, eg: "I suck at difficult conversations but want to practice"

Get permission

First get the other persons world

When they feel heard, only then ask if they are ok to hear your side.

Name feelings, say what you want.

Soft start, and 5:1 ratio.

## 1.2 The Practice

### STEP 1: Preparation

Before initiating the conversation first get outside of your story. Devote some quiet time to:

- Identify the presence of any judgment or blame constructs. Be curious about them.
- Be able to describe the single specific event that occurred, like a video camera would see it. Avoid scooping up multiple events or patterns.
- Construct a third chair perspective, ie. be able to describe my role, their role, and the interaction of the two. Conflict almost always has joint contributions.
- Identify what my feelings are. Focus on primary emotion, and avoid interpretative 'feelings' like "not heard", or "disrespected".
- As a product of that feeling, identify what it is that i might want. This is not necessarily a request. It's more just what is alive right now. It can change.
- If you can not identify your part, your vulnerable feeling, and your desire, repeat step 1.
- Check what your purpose is.
- Prepare, ahead of time some wise mind responses in case the other party responds with blame or defensiveness. Eg: "I am hearing some frustration", or "I really want to understand you, so would love it if you could try to say that in a different way". "Could you give an example?" etc.

### STEP 2: The Invitation

As part of the invitation to the conversation share the short version of your third chair perspective, ask if they are willing to participate, and agree on a suitable time to hold the conversation. Be sure to let them know that your intention is to understand both sides.

### STEP 3: The Conversation

First co-create context:

- share intentions, and what a desirable outcome might look like.
- establish a mutually agreeable turn taking procedure.
- set a time limit.

Decide who will go first...

1. A: Describe the specific event without interpretation
2. A: Name my part, and my third chair perspective
3. A: Share my feelings, and desires
4. B: Occasionally pause A to reflect, validate, or ask any clarifying questions.
5. When A is complete, switch roles, and repeat.