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# Having difficult conversations

Getting started with discussions about behaviours of concern



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Direction

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Working together on positive  
behaviour support (PBS)

## Communicating during difficult conversations

Having difficult conversations is stressful at any time, let alone if you are someone living with a disability who is needing to talk about personal things that are naturally the focus of behaviour support planning, such as behaviours of concern.

These conversations can be stressful not only for someone talking about their life and their behaviour, but also for others in the conversation. As the behaviour support practitioner, you will need to guide these conversations.

Planning and some key principles can help you with this process and ensure a focus on engaging with the person in a way that makes them as comfortable as possible. This helps the behaviour support planning process to be a positive one. It will also mean that the resulting plan is one that:

- meets [the participant's communication rights](#),
- is one you both agree on, and
- helps you get to the heart of that person's needs and goals, and understand how best to meet them.

## Before you get started

Consider these things before you start the conversation:

### 1. How does the person you are supporting communicate?

Familiarise yourself with their preferred communication methods and know how to use those methods effectively to communicate authentically with the person.

You may wish to review:

- [principles of yarning](#) to help build rapport and trust,
- [adapting communication for different people](#),
- [engaging effectively through 2-way communication](#),
- [different communication and engagement techniques](#), and
- [signs of successful communication and engagement](#).

### 2. Who needs to be part of the conversation?

Consider who else might need to be a part of the conversation (e.g., a member of the person's family, a support worker, a health care professional, etc.) and ensure that they are available to participate in the conversation and understand the reason why the conversation needs to

take place. Make sure to check your participant is comfortable having the conversation with this person present.

### **3. When and where is best to have the conversation?**

Such conversations should be held at a time and place that is most convenient and comfortable for the person you are supporting to ensure that they are coming into the conversation settled and calm.

## Key difficult topics in the behaviour support process

The following topics may be difficult to discuss with people with disabilities when it comes to behaviour support planning (please note this list is not exhaustive):

- Conflicts with key people in the person's life, such as family members, co-residents or housemates, and support staff, that may be impacting the person's behaviour.
- The person with disability's behaviours of concern, including why they occur, what happens when they occur and their impact on the person and others.
- The content of a person's behaviour support plan, including the proposed strategies and any restrictions placed on the person.
- Negotiating boundaries or expectations when it comes to behaviour support planning and positive behaviour support strategies.
- Safety versus dignity of risk – balancing the need to keep people safe, while also allowing people to take appropriate risks.
- The proposed use of any restrictive practices to keep the person and others safe.
- Emotions/feelings like grief and loss and trauma.

- Medical, mental health or health concerns that may be impacting their behaviours.
- How the person's disability might impact on the person's ability to understand and make decisions related to behaviour support and how this will impact their engagement in behaviour support planning (e.g., capacity to make decisions and consent).
- Changes to a person's routine or environment that may be unexpected or not preferred, and how to manage this effectively.

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## Remember

A person can choose NOT to be part of a conversation  
and how involved they wish to be.

This needs to be respected and if this is the case,  
behaviour support practitioners need to have a 'Plan B'  
around who is the next appropriate person in the  
participant's personal or professional support networks  
to have this difficult conversation with.

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