
Preparing for difficult conversations

Examples and tips for behaviour support
practitioners



The
Right
Direction

Working together on positive
behaviour support (PBS)

10 tips for preparing for difficult behaviour support discussions

In situations when difficult conversations happen, it is important to make sure the conversation meets the person's communication style and needs. [Using clear language](#), [visual supports](#), and a calm, patient approach can help make these conversations easier to have.

1. Be clear about your purpose

Know why you're having the conversation and what outcome you hope for. Stay focused on that goal.

Goals might include:

- improving the participant's quality of life,
- making sure people's rights are respected,
- ensuring everyone is working together,
- ensuring the agreed goals and strategies are implemented,
- keeping people safe.

2. Choose the right time and place

Pick a setting where both of you can talk openly without distractions or pressure. Timing matters—don't start the conversation when emotions are high. Sometimes, [having a chat \(or a yarn\)](#) can ease any pressure and 'reset' the mood so the difficult conversation can take place.

Things to consider include:

- should the conversation take place in private room (or out in the garden) at the participant's home?
- should the conversation take place away from the participant's home (at an office off-site, or in a park down the street)?
- should the conversation take place with someone else present or someone else close to hand if they need to be called in at some point?

3. Stay calm and respectful

Keep your tone even and avoid blaming or attacking the other person. Respect goes a long way in tough conversations.

It is important to:

- ask the person about what they think the conversation is about and why it is needed,
- be clear about your concerns and ask them if they have concerns too,
- be clear that you are interested in what they have to say, and what their opinion is / how they think things are going.

4. Listen more than you speak

Really hear what the other person is saying. Let them finish before responding and ask questions to make sure you understand their point of view. This is one of [their communication rights](#).

You might ask them:

- about the behaviours of concern,
- what they think about the support strategies,
- if they think the strategies could be used in a different way,
- if they think any other strategies could be used and, if so, how?

5. Use 'I' statements instead of 'you' statements

Saying '*I feel hurt when...*' is better than '*You always do this!*' It makes the conversation less confrontational.

Try, instead:

- 'I don't understand what you are trying to tell me when you [behave in a particular way].....'
- 'I don't understand why we can't get these strategies to work, do you have any suggestions?'
- 'Is there something else I could do to make this easier / help this to work?'

6. Stick to facts, not assumptions

Talk about what actually happened, not what you think their intentions were. Assumptions can lead to misunderstandings.

Try, instead:

- ‘I was confused about why [.....] happened, can you help me understand?’
- ‘when [.....] I was expecting that [.....] can you help me understand?’

7. Acknowledge others' feelings

You don't have to agree, but showing you understand their emotions helps build trust and reduces defensiveness.

Try, instead:

- 'it seems that you might have been thinking / feeling ...'
- 'I can understand that you might have been thinking / feeling...'
- 'if I'd been in a similar situation, I would have likely been thinking / feeling...'

8. Be open to compromise

Difficult conversations are not about 'winning'. Be flexible and look for solutions that work for both of you.

Try, suggesting:

- 'we can work together work make this happen.'
- 'what do you think might work?'

9. Take breaks if needed

If emotions run too high, it's okay to pause and continue later when both of you are calmer.

Try suggesting:

- 'now might not be the right time to have this conversation, how about we meet again [agree a place, date, & time]?'
- 'before we continue this conversation, it might be a good idea if [agree on some activity to prepare for the next meeting].'

10. End with a clear next step

Summarise what was discussed and agree on what happens next. This helps prevent misunderstandings and keeps things moving forward.

Try saying:

- 'what we have talked about today has been [.....].'
- 'before we meet again I need to [.....] and I'd like you to [.....].'
- '...and then, when we next catch up we will [.....].'



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