



Moving Toward a Learning Conversation

Difficult Conversation Skill Sheet

STEP 1 Use a **Three Conversations Approach** (yours, mine, ours)

1. **Sort out What Happened.**

- Where does **your** story come from (information, past experiences, rules, beliefs)?
- Where does **their** story come from (information, past experiences, rules, beliefs)?
- What impact has this situation had on you?
- What might their **intentions** have been?
- What have you **each contributed** to the problem?

2. **Understand Emotions**

- Explore the feelings you experience and the ones you evoke.
- How do they collide and intensify emotions?
- What impact are past events and actions having on current emotions?

Step 2 **Check your Purposes. Decide Whether to Raise the Issue.**

1. **Purposes:**

- What do you hope to accomplish by having this conversation?
- Shift your stance to support **learning, sharing and problem-solving.**

2. **Deciding:**

- Is this the best way to address the issue and achieve your purpose?
- Is the issue really embedded in your **Identity Conversation**
(What do you feel/believe it says about you?)
- Can you affect the problem by changing **your contribution**?
- If you **don't raise** the issue, what **can you do** to help yourself let go?

Step 3 **Start from the Third Story*** — (the perspective of a neutral observer)

1. Describe the problem as the difference between your stories.
Include **both** viewpoints as a **legitimate** part of the discussion.
2. Share your **Purposes**.
3. **Invite** them to join you as a **partner** in sorting out the situation together.
4. Gather data.
 - Where do the versions **coincide**?
 - Where do the versions **diverge**?

Step 4 Explore their story and yours.

1. **Listen to understand** their perspective on what happened.
Listen to learn the elements of their point of view.
Understanding does not equate to agreeing.
2. Ask questions. **Be curious**.
3. **Acknowledge the feelings** behind the arguments and accusations.
4. **Paraphrase** to see if you have got it.
5. Try to **unravel** how the two of you got to this place.
 - What decisions were made?
 - What actions occurred, or did not occur?
 - What agreements and expectations were in place?
 - How were they met and how did they fall short?
 - What prevented the agreement from being met?
 - Was the obstacle preventable, anticipated or unexpected?

Step 5 Problem Solving

1. Create **Options**
Be sure they meet each side's most important concerns and interests.
2. Link options to your **Goal** for what *should* happen.
(e.g. **mutual caring and respect**;
3. Talk about how to keep **communication** open as you go forward.

Reframe from

Reframe to

To

“Truth/ Reality”

My Perception

His/her Perception

Blame

My Contribution

His/her Contribution

Accusations

My feelings

His/her feelings

The And Stance: Don't choose between the stories; embrace both.

The And Stance allows each of you to recognize that *how you each* see things matters....Because you may have different information or different interpretations, both stories can make sense at the same time...Sometimes people have honest disagreements, but even so, the most useful question is not “Who’s right?” but “Now that we really understand each other, what’s a good way to manage this problem?”...Remember, understanding the other person’s story doesn’t mean you have to agree with it. Wherever you want to go, understanding – imagining yourself into the other person’s story – has got to be your first step. Before you can figure out how to move forward, you need to understand where you are....People almost never change without first feeling understood.”

-from **Difficult Conversations** by Douglas Stone, Penguin Books 1999

Three Conversations (Mine, His/Hers, Ours)

What do I know about:

My own feelings? _____

My own experiences? _____

My own story? _____

What I don't know about the other person: _____

Their intentions _____

Their perspective _____

Their feelings _____

OUR Solution, How WE will get from **HERE to **THERE**?** _____

