



Preparing for Challenging Conversations

We practice fire drills to make sure we know how to protect ourselves in case of a fire. Similarly, having conversations about conflicts can protect a relationship from potential harm.

*Preparing for conflicts won't prevent them, but it **will** lay a foundation of respect and trust in a relationship. You'll be able to transform conflicts from potential threats into opportunities that strengthen a relationship.*

Introduction

Taking the time to talk about how to handle conflict shows a commitment to the long-term health of the relationship. However, this conversation may not be easy for everyone. A person can have a sincere commitment to a relationship and still find it hard to talk about conflict.

Be patient if the other person in your relationship isn't ready for a conversation about conflict. Respecting each other's differences allows for honest and open communication, which is essential for a strong relationship.

One reason the conversation might be uncomfortable is that it requires people to be vulnerable. The conversation asks us to reveal things that we might consider faults or weaknesses. Those things are hard to admit to ourselves, let alone to someone else. A certain level of trust in the relationship is needed before we're willing to do that.

If a conflict happens before you've had a chance to prepare for it, that's okay. It can be a learning experience for the relationship. Reflecting on an actual conflict— instead of talking about something that hasn't happened yet—might even be easier for some people.

Activity: Preparing for Challenging Conversations

Discuss the questions below in any order.

To get the most benefit out of this activity, we recommend that the employer and direct care worker answer the questions on their own first before discussing them together.

Think back to past conflicts to answer the questions. The more specific your answers, the more helpful the conversation will be. If your answer is “it depends,” explain what factors affect your reaction.

Questions	Notes
<p>1. How do I generally react to conflict? Does my reaction depend on the situation or person?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">☒ I tend to get defensive and criticize or blame the other person.☒ I “shut down” (stop talking, walk away, ...)- I “give in” just to bring the discomfort of a conflict to an end.	

Questions	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- I listen to what the other person has to say to see if we can find a solution.- My goal is to “win” or get my way.	
2. What do I do when someone annoys me? ¹	
3. What do I do when someone hurts my feelings?	

¹ Note that a conflict exists even if the other person isn't aware that they're annoying you. How you handle it (or don't handle it) affects the relationship.

Questions	Notes
4. Do I express my emotions during a conflict or do I hide them? Which emotions? How do I show them?	
5. Do I deal with conflict right away? Or do I need time to gather my thoughts and/or calm down first?	
6. If I'm upset about something, do I prefer to talk about it face-to-face or handle it with an email, a written note, or....?	

Questions	Notes
7. How do I handle feedback? Does my reaction depend on whether I asked for the feedback or not?	

- Is there anything else you'd like the other person to know that would help you in a conflict?

- What did you learn about how you can help the other person in a conflict?