

How To Navigate

Tough Conversations



Your go-to framework for navigating challenging discussions with your team.



Welcome to the Tough Conversations Checklist, your go-to framework for navigating challenging discussions with your team.

This guide will help you prepare, execute, and follow up on tough conversations, ensuring you achieve positive outcomes while maintaining strong relationships.

Remember, "**unclear is unkind**", as Brené Brown famously said. Clarity in communication prevents small issues from becoming major problems.

Now, let's jump in!



Where you are VS where you'll get to

Think about how crucial conversations at work currently feel, we imagine it's like navigating a minefield. You go in unprepared, hoping for the best but often leave feeling frustrated and misunderstood. The lack of preparation leaves you scrambling for information, while unclear objectives muddle your message. Reflecting on these experiences, it's clear that something needs to change.

To make sure this one goes smoothly, you decide to start with meticulous preparation. You gather all the necessary information and documents, collecting data and examples that will support your points. You even anticipate the questions your colleague might ask and prepare resources to address them. With your objectives clear in mind, you envision what a successful outcome looks like, focusing on the key messages you need to communicate.

But you know preparation alone isn't enough. Reflecting on why you find these conversations challenging, you recall previous experiences that didn't go as planned. You realise how personal biases and triggers influenced your reactions. Determined to do better, you think about what worked well in past discussions and what didn't. This self-awareness becomes your guide. You decide to monitor your emotional state and body language, making a conscious effort to stay calm and composed. You remind yourself to be mindful of your tone and choice of words, aiming to create a more positive interaction.

As the conversation begins, you re-frame your mindset. Instead of viewing this as a confrontation, you approach it as a collaboration. You focus on problem-solving and building a stronger working relationship. Together, you and your colleague discuss mutual goals, emphasising shared interests and desired outcomes. You make a point to acknowledge their contributions, recognising their efforts and input, fostering a sense of teamwork and mutual respect.

Throughout the conversation, you assume positive intent, believing your colleague has good intentions. You ask open-ended questions to gather more information and listen actively, showing empathy and clarifying any misunderstandings. You provide complete information, ensuring your colleague has the necessary context to understand the issue. As you move forward, you confirm understanding, using simple and clear language and avoiding jargon. Together, you agree on key terms and concepts, creating a common language for your discussion.

To ensure the environment is conducive to open communication, you choose a neutral, comfortable setting, free from distractions. You arrange the seating to promote equality and reduce tension, removing any physical barriers between you.

You outline the conversation, preparing an agenda and talking points while remaining flexible to adapt based on the direction of the discussion. You seek permission to engage, acknowledging any past communication gaps and expressing your intention to improve. By framing your request positively, you highlight the benefits of the conversation and your commitment to mutual improvement.

As the conversation unfolds, you leave assumptions behind and approach with an open mind. You ask open-ended questions, encouraging dialogue and giving your colleague the space to explain their side. You listen actively, reflecting back what you hear to show understanding and validating their feelings and perspectives. This approach transforms what could have been a difficult discussion into a productive and collaborative conversation, strengthening your working relationship and achieving your mutual goals.

Throughout the conversation, you maintain a belief in their positive intent. Instead of jumping to conclusions, you ask open-ended questions and listen empathetically. You provide complete information and ensure your colleague has all the context they need to understand the issue. This clarity helps avoid the misunderstandings that often plagued past conversations.

You also ensure that your environment supports open communication. Gone are the days of meeting in stressful, distracting locations. Now, you choose a neutral, comfortable setting, free from interruptions. You outline the conversation with a clear agenda, but stay flexible, ready to adapt based on the discussion's direction. You seek permission to engage, acknowledging any past communication gaps and expressing your intention to improve. Framing your request positively, you highlight the benefits of the conversation and your commitment to mutual improvement.

By the end of the conversation, you notice a significant difference. Instead of feeling drained and unresolved, you leave with a sense of accomplishment and mutual understanding. The open-ended questions, active listening, and validation of feelings transform what used to be difficult discussions into productive, collaborative exchanges. The checklist has not only improved your approach but also strengthened your working relationships and helped achieve your goals.

The transformation is clear.

Your Conversation Checklist



what used to be fraught with frustration is now approached with confidence and clarity, all thanks to a simple but powerful checklist.



Preparation Is Key

01

- **Review the Framework/Checklist:**
 - Familiarise yourself with each step.
 - Identify the most relevant points for your specific conversation.
 - Ensure you have all necessary information and documents ready.
- **Gather Information:**
 - Collect data or examples that support your discussion.
 - Anticipate potential questions or concerns the other party might have.
 - Prepare any additional resources that might be helpful.
- **Set Objectives:**
 - Define the goals you want to achieve from the conversation.
 - Consider what a successful outcome looks like.
 - Be clear on the key messages you need to communicate.

Understand Yourself

02

- **Identify Personal Challenges:**
 - Reflect on why you find the conversation challenging.
 - Consider previous experiences that may influence your feelings.
 - Acknowledge any personal biases or triggers.
- **Reflect on Past Experiences:**
 - Think about similar conversations and their outcomes.
 - Identify what worked well and what didn't.
 - Use past experiences to inform your approach.
- **Practice Self-Awareness:**
 - Monitor your emotional state and body language.
 - Stay calm and composed during the conversation.
 - Be aware of your tone and choice of words.

Shift The Goal Posts

03

- **Reframe the Mindset:**
 - Approach the conversation as a collaboration, not a confrontation.
 - Focus on problem-solving rather than assigning blame.
 - Aim to build a stronger working relationship.
- **Discuss Mutual Goals:**
 - Identify common objectives both parties can agree on.
 - Emphasise shared interests and desired outcomes.
 - Highlight how working together benefits everyone.
- **Value Their Contribution:**
 - Recognise and acknowledge the other person's efforts and input.
 - Show appreciation for their perspective and ideas.
 - Foster a sense of teamwork and mutual respect.

Rethink Intent

04

- **Assume Positive Intent:**
 - Approach the conversation believing the other person has good intentions.
 - Give them the benefit of the doubt.
 - Avoid jumping to conclusions or making assumptions.
- **Seek Understanding:**
 - Ask open-ended questions to gather more information.
 - Listen actively and empathetically.
 - Clarify any misunderstandings or gaps in knowledge.
- **Provide Complete Information:**
 - Ensure the other person has all the necessary context to understand the issue.
 - Explain the rationale behind your concerns or decisions.
 - Share any relevant data or examples that illustrate your points.

Clarify Definitions

05

- **Confirm Understanding:**
 - Ask the person to clarify their understanding of key terms and phrases.
 - Paraphrase their responses to ensure accuracy.
 - Address any discrepancies in understanding immediately.
- **Avoid Miscommunication:**
 - Use simple and clear language.
 - Avoid jargon or technical terms unless necessary.
 - Check for comprehension throughout the conversation.
- **Define Key Terms Together:**
 - Agree on the meaning of important words and concepts.
 - Create a common language for discussing the issue.
 - Document agreed-upon definitions if necessary.

Consider The Environment

06

- **Choose the Right Setting:**
 - Opt for in-person meetings in a neutral, comfortable environment.
 - Avoid high-stress or distracting locations.
 - Ensure privacy and confidentiality.
- **Create a Safe Space:**
 - Make the environment conducive to open and honest communication.
 - Arrange seating to promote equality and reduce tension.
 - Remove physical barriers (like desks) between participants.
- **Eliminate Distractions:**
 - Turn off phones and other electronic devices.
 - Ensure the meeting area is quiet and free from interruptions.
 - Schedule the meeting at a time when both parties can fully engage.

Structures For Success

07

- **Outline the Conversation:**
 - Plan the structure and flow of the discussion.
 - Prepare an agenda or talking points.
 - Identify the key topics to cover and in what order.
- **Use the Checklist:**
 - Refer to the checklist to guide the conversation.
 - Ensure all critical areas are addressed.
 - Stay on track and avoid tangents.
- **Be Flexible:**
 - Allow for adjustments based on the conversation's direction.
 - Be open to new information and perspectives.
 - Adapt your approach as needed to achieve the best outcome.

Ask For Permission

08

- **Acknowledge Past Gaps:**
 - Start by admitting any previous communication shortcomings.
 - Express your intention to improve.
 - Show a willingness to learn and grow.
 - **Seek Consent:**
 - Ask if it's okay to provide feedback and have the conversation.
 - Ensure the other person is ready and receptive.
 - Respect their readiness to engage.
 - **Frame the Request Positively:**
 - Explain the benefits of having the conversation.
 - Highlight how it will help both parties.
 - Emphasise your commitment to mutual improvement.
-

Seek To Understand

09

- **Leave Assumptions Behind:**
 - Approach with an open mind and avoid preconceived notions.
 - Be curious rather than judgmental.
 - Give the other person a chance to explain their side.
 - **Ask Open-Ended Questions:**
 - Encourage dialogue by asking questions that elicit detailed responses.
 - Use phrases like “Can you tell me more about...” or “How do you feel about...”.
 - Avoid yes/no questions that shut down conversation.
 - **Listen Actively:**
 - Pay full attention to the speaker without interrupting.
 - Reflect back what you hear to show understanding.
 - Validate their feelings and perspectives.
-

How To Communicate With

Different Types of Practitioners



Different people require different communication styles; adapt to their characteristics for better engagement in conversations.



Different Types Of Practitioners Personas And How To Manage Them

Through our journey as clinic owners, we've navigated numerous tough conversations and discovered a recurring pattern. We've identified that practitioners often fall into three distinct categories during these challenging discussions. Based on our experience, we've outlined these types for you below.

1. The Defensive Practitioner

Key Characteristics:

- Avoids Blame: Often deflects responsibility and avoids admitting mistakes.
- Emotional Reaction: May become upset, angry, or visibly stressed when receiving criticism.
- Rationalises Behavior: Justifies actions and decisions with extensive explanations or excuses.

2. The Passive Practitioner

Key Characteristics:

- Avoids Confrontation: Tends to agree with feedback without engaging in meaningful discussion.
- Lack of Initiative: Shows little enthusiasm for change or improvement, preferring to maintain the status quo.
- Subtle Resistance: May agree verbally but fail to follow through on commitments or changes.

3. The Overwhelmed Practitioner

Key Characteristics:

- High Stress Levels: Exhibits signs of stress and burnout, such as fatigue, irritability, or frequent mistakes.
- Expresses Frustration: Openly shares feelings of being overwhelmed or unsupported.
- Struggles with Prioritisation: Finds it difficult to manage tasks effectively, often leading to missed deadlines or subpar performance.

Strategies for Each Persona:

As we navigated our journey as clinic owners, we didn't just identify three distinct types of practitioners; we also uncovered the best strategies for engaging them during tough conversations. Through trial and error, and countless discussions, we've learned how to ensure these practitioners stay engaged and responsive

1. The Defensive Practitioner

- **Stay Calm and Neutral:**
 - Keep your tone calm and your body language open to avoid escalating their defensiveness.
- **Focus on Specific Behaviours:**
 - Provide clear, concrete examples of the behaviour in question rather than general criticisms.
- **Encourage Self-Reflection:**
 - Ask questions that prompt self-reflection, such as “How do you think this situation could have been handled differently?”

2. The Passive Practitioner

- **Engage Actively:**
 - Use open-ended questions to encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.
- **Clarify Expectations:**
 - Be clear about what changes are needed and why, and ensure they understand their responsibilities.
- **Follow Up:**
 - Schedule regular check-ins to monitor progress and provide support.

3. The Overwhelmed Practitioner

- **Show Empathy:**
 - Acknowledge their feelings and stress, showing that you understand their situation.
- **Prioritise Tasks:**
 - Help them identify and prioritise the most critical tasks to manage their workload better.
- **Provide Support:**
 - Offer resources or suggest solutions, such as additional training, delegation, or time management strategies.

Example Conversations With The Different Practitioner Personas

Situation:

A clinic owner needed to address a practitioner's consistent tardiness.

Approach:

Using the checklist, the owner prepared by gathering attendance records, reflecting on their feelings about the issue, and framing the conversation to focus on mutual goals.

Outcome:

The practitioner appreciated the clarity and support, leading to improved punctuality and a stronger professional relationship.

Defensive Practitioner Conversation Example:

Clinic Owner:

"Hi [Practitioner], thanks for meeting with me. I've noticed a pattern of tardiness over the past few weeks, and I wanted to discuss it with you."

Defensive Practitioner:

"I don't see why this is such a big deal. I still get my work done."

Clinic Owner:

"I understand that it might not seem significant, but I have noticed you've been late on these specific dates: [list dates]. This impacts our team's ability to provide consistent care to our patients."

Defensive Practitioner:

"But it's only a few minutes here and there. Why make a fuss?"

Clinic Owner:

"I find this conversation challenging because I know how dedicated you are, and I don't want this to come across as an attack. We both want to ensure our patients receive the best care possible. How can we work together to address this?"

Defensive Practitioner:

"Well, sometimes things just come up. Traffic, personal stuff..."

Clinic Owner:

"I believe you have good reasons for being late, and I want to understand them. When we talk about punctuality, we mean being here and ready to see patients at the start of your shift. Do you agree?"

Example Conversations With The Different Practitioner Personas

Defensive Practitioner:

"Yeah, I get that."

Clinic Owner:

"I appreciate us having this conversation in a quiet, private space where we can talk openly. So, I've outlined the instances of tardiness and its impact. Now, let's explore some solutions. Is it okay if we discuss how we can improve this situation together?"

Defensive Practitioner:

"Sure, I guess."

Clinic Owner:

"Can you share with me what has been causing you to be late?"

Defensive Practitioner:

"I don't know, just running late sometimes."

Clinic Owner:

"I believe you. My goal here is not to place blame but to find a solution that works for both of us. We want to ensure our patients receive timely care. How do you think we can address this?"

Defensive Practitioner:

"Maybe I can adjust my schedule a bit."

Clinic Owner:

"That sounds like a good start. Let's work together to make a plan that ensures punctuality and supports your needs as well."

Passive Practitioner Conversation Example:

Clinic Owner:

"Hi [Practitioner], thanks for meeting with me. I've noticed you've been arriving late quite frequently. Can we talk about what might be causing this?"

Passive Practitioner:

"Sure, if you think it's a problem."

Example Conversations With The Different Practitioner Personas

Clinic Owner:

"I appreciate your willingness to discuss this. I've seen you've been late on these specific dates: [list dates]. This is starting to affect our team's ability to provide consistent care."

Passive Practitioner:

"Okay, I understand."

Clinic Owner:

"I want to make sure this conversation is supportive and constructive, as I know how valuable you are to the team. We both want to ensure our patients receive the best care. How can we work together to address this?"

Passive Practitioner:

"I don't know, I guess I can try to be on time."

Clinic Owner:

"I assume you have good reasons for being late, and I want to understand them. When we talk about punctuality, we mean being here and ready to see patients at the start of your shift. Do you agree?"

Passive Practitioner:

"Yes, that makes sense."

Clinic Owner:

"I'm glad we're discussing this in a quiet, private space where we can talk openly. I've shared instances of tardiness and its impact. Now, let's explore some solutions. Is it okay if we discuss how we can improve this situation together?"

Passive Practitioner:

"Yeah, that's fine."

Clinic Owner:

"Can you share with me what has been causing you to be late?"

Passive Practitioner:

"I just lose track of time in the mornings."

Example Conversations With The Different Practitioner Personas

Clinic Owner:

"I appreciate your openness. Let's outline a few steps to make this easier. Perhaps setting a reminder or adjusting your morning routine could help. What do you think?"

Passive Practitioner:

"Yeah, I can do that."

Clinic Owner:

"Great. We'll check in again next week to see how it's going. Remember, this is about ensuring we can provide the best care for our patients together."

Overwhelmed Practitioner Conversation Example:

Clinic Owner:

"Hi [Practitioner], thanks for taking the time to talk. I've noticed you've been late several times recently. Can we discuss what's been going on?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"I'm so sorry. I've just been really stressed and struggling to keep up with everything."

Clinic Owner:

"I understand how challenging things can get. I've noticed you've been late on these specific dates: [list dates]. This is starting to affect our team's ability to provide consistent care."

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"I know, it's just been so hard to manage everything."

Clinic Owner:

"I find this conversation difficult because I know how hard you work, and I want to support you. We both want to ensure our patients receive the best care possible. How can we work together to address this?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"I'm not sure. I just feel like there's too much to do."

Example Conversations With The Different Practitioner Personas

Clinic Owner:

"I believe you have good reasons for being late, and I want to understand them. When we talk about punctuality, we mean being here and ready to see patients at the start of your shift. Do you agree?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"Yes, I understand."

Clinic Owner:

"I'm glad we're having this conversation in a private space where we can talk openly. I've shared instances of tardiness and its impact. Now, let's explore some solutions. Is it okay if we discuss how we can improve this situation together?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"Yes, that would be helpful."

Clinic Owner:

"Can you share with me what has been causing you to be late?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"I don't know. I just feel like there's too much to do."

Clinic Owner:

"Let's break it down together. Maybe we can prioritise tasks or adjust your workload. Would that help you arrive on time?"

Overwhelmed Practitioner:

"Yes, that would be great."

Clinic Owner:

"Okay, let's create a plan to manage your workload more effectively. We'll also schedule regular check-ins to ensure you're supported and able to be on time."

Your Personal
**Tough Conversations
Workbook**



Get ready for your tough conversations by completing this section.



Step 1: Preparation

1. Define the Purpose of the Conversation

- What is the main issue or feedback you need to address?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Gather Supporting Information

- What evidence or examples support your points?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Identify Key Points to Discuss

- What are the key points you want to cover?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 2: Understanding Yourself

1. Identify Your Feelings

- How do you feel about having this conversation? (e.g., nervous, frustrated)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Recognise Potential Biases

- Are there any biases or assumptions you need to set aside?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Clarify Your Intentions

- What do you hope to achieve with this conversation?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 3: Shift the Goal Posts

1. Set Mutual Goals

- What outcome do you both want to achieve?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Reframe the Conversation

- How can you frame the conversation to focus on collaboration rather than competition?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Value Their Contribution

- How will you acknowledge the other person's value and contribution?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 4: Environment and Structure

1. Choose the Right Setting

- Where and how will you conduct the conversation? (e.g., private office, walking meeting)

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Create a Safe Space

- How will you ensure the environment is conducive to an open discussion?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Plan the Structure

- Outline the structure of your conversation:

- Introduction: _____
- Main Points: _____
- Closing: _____

Step 5: Seeking Permission

1. Prepare Your Opening Statement

- What will you say to ask for permission and set the tone?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Acknowledge Past Mistakes

- How will you acknowledge any past avoidance or mistakes?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Ask for Collaboration

- How will you invite the other person to collaborate on a solution?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Step 6: Seeking to Understand

1. Open-Ended Questions

- What open-ended questions will you ask to understand their perspective?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Leave Assumptions at the Door

- How will you ensure you approach the conversation without assumptions?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Actively Listen

- How will you demonstrate active listening during the conversation?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Reflection Section

1. Post-Conversation Reflection

- What went well during the conversation?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. Areas for Improvement

- What could have been improved?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

3. Next Steps

- What are the next steps based on the outcome of the conversation?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Additional Notes:
