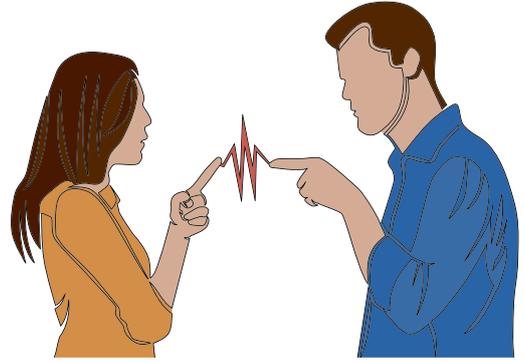


THREE WHAT'S



Difficult Conversations

What

Most of us are likely to have difficult conversations. Some of those conversations lie ahead and are anticipated with dread. Others become difficult because they follow an 'ambush', and you find yourself having to do something for which you're unprepared. Things can, and do, go badly wrong.

So What?

Working on some simple skills and steps will help reduce the discomfort. There are three phases to managing a difficult conversation. The first is Positioning. This is about being prepared: knowing yourself, the other person and the issue. The second is Participating. This is about listening, asking the right questions and seeking solutions. The final phase is Parting. This is about an agreed resolution, a commitment and leaving with dignity.

Now What?

The big thing to work on is separating the person from their behaviour. In other words, don't attribute an action, a comment or a behaviour to their personality. Avoid generalisations - '*you always do this!*' – and remain focused on the beneficial outcome. Use plain language.

- Positioning
 - Know your own emotional 'hot buttons' as failing to manage these will hijack your discussion. Avoid imposing your own values. Know the facts around the issue.
- Participating
 - Be prepared to listen - without judgment - to the other person. Let them vent, unload and explain! Ask questions that empty the person of the information.
 - Agree the facts around the issue. Avoid assumptions, inferences and off the shelf solutions.
 - Ask what they want. Listen. Adjust. State what you want. Keep it simple.
 - Having stated what you want, ask if that's acceptable to them and close.
- Partitioning
 - Leave the conversation with the issue resolved, a commitment to an agreed action in place and with the emotions 'flattened out.'
 - Move on!

Our ThreeWhats Playbook on difficult conversations provides you with guidelines and examples to develop skills and steps. We also provide sources and research evidence for all our guidance.