

Handling difficult conversations

While addressing difficult issues, it is essential that the message is delivered in a supportive manner and that the way in which the message is given does not make the discussion worse.

Preparation is essential

- Think about the outcomes that would be the most positive. The single most important outcome is that the individual feels positively motivated to take action and knows what he or she needs to do.
- Be assertive.

Structure of the discussion

1. Get to the point.
2. Deliver your message in clear terms. Don't cover up the message.
3. Give your conversation partner the time to process the message: silence is okay.
4. Make clear what the next steps are and go through them together.

Possible reactions of the addressee

Frustration or anger:

- Remain calm, objective and sincerely supportive.
- Explain the overall context. Is this an important issue or a small one?
- Listen fully to the individual's concerns and explore as appropriate.
- Understand their needs.
- When possible, keep a positive focus on the way ahead: "Let's look at what we can do."

Emotional reactions:

- Stay calm and positive. Maintain a supportive atmosphere.
- Allow the individual the opportunity to recover his or her composure.
- Offer a break if this is appropriate.
- Show empathy, understand what is difficult for them and acknowledge this.
- Offer to reconvene when the individual has had time to internalise what has been covered.