



## Preparing for Hard Conversations

### 1. Goal of the conversation

- Write your primary goal or desired outcome for the conversation.
- Is this goal realistic and achievable? Why or why not?

### 2. Identifying Your Story

- What is the problem from your point of view?
  - Describe the issue as you see it. Be specific about behaviors, actions, or events that are problematic.
- Ask yourself these questions
  - What am I assuming about the other person, their intention, or the situation?
  - Is there any information I am missing?
  - Where might I be wrong?
  - What is my contribution to the problem?
  - Are there past or current events influencing my thoughts or feelings about this situation?

### 3. Understanding Their Story

- Questions or phrases to consider
  - Help me understand ...
  - Tell me more ...
  - How did you experience ...?
  - Ask about their thoughts, feelings, perspectives, or values around the situation or conflict.

### 4. Starting the conversation well

- Soft start-up considerations
  - Tone of voice, body language, facial expression
  - Avoid blaming, attacking, criticizing character
  - Avoid black-and-white language like “always” and “never”

- Use “I feel” statements rather than “You” statements.
  - I feel ... (feeling you experienced as a result of an action or behavior)
  - When you ... (factual statement of the specific action or behavior)
  - Because ... (a consequence of specific action or behavior)
  - I would like ... (proposed solution)

## 5. What to do when things start to go poorly

- Ask to start over using phrases like
  - Could we try that again?
  - This isn't going how I hoped; could we try starting over?
- Use gem statements: things you can both agree on or common ground.
  - Examples:
    - We are on the same team.
    - We both want the project to succeed.

## 6. What to do when the conversation goes off the rails

- Take a break to calm your sympathetic nervous system.
  - Ideas: walk, deep breathing, prayer, listen to music
  - Not the time to think about clever comebacks
  - Helpful phrases to consider
    - I need a break.
    - Could we circle back to this?
    - I'm at capacity; could we talk about this tomorrow?
    - I value our discussion and what you are saying, but I need more time to think before I respond.

## Tips for the Conversation

- Approach with humility and a spirit of curiosity.
- Keep the end goal in mind.
- Focus on the issue, not the person.
- Be clear and concise when sharing your perspective.
- Invite feedback and be open to their point of view.
- Seek solutions collaboratively.