Key Conversations – Difficult Conversations Workshop Presentation

This resource was developed by the NDS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness Project and is funded by the Government of Western Australia Department of Communities.

This is the content of the Difficult Conversations Workshop Presentation which includes the content of the slides and the relevant notes. These slides were designed to be used alongside the Key Conversations – Difficult Conversations Facilitator Guide.

**Please note:** This resource was developed in January 2024 by the NDS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness Project. The resource is general in nature and is provided as a guide only. NDS believes that the information contained in this publication is correct at the time of publishing, however, NDS reserves the right to vary any of this publication without further notice. The information provided in this publication should not be relied upon instead of other legal, medical, financial, or professional advice. Please always refer to online documents for the latest versions including the NDIS Practice Standards and advice to providers on the Code of Conduct.

# Slide 1: Key Conversations – Difficult Conversations

## Notes:

**Welcome**

**Introductions if needed**

**Housekeeping**

**Support options for workers**

Let the group know that if the activity or discussion brings up current or past situations that they have been part of, or if they have concerns, they can:

* Leave the session at any time if they do not feel comfortable.
* Advise the group of any identified people who you have made available, to discuss any concerns if they choose to.
* Encourage people to seek support from an appropriate person after the session.
* Discuss any Employee Assistance Programs or other organisational supports that may be available.

**Go through factsheets and any supporting resources - 5 minutes.**

Instructions: “To help you with these exercises, you should have the team workbook in front of you. The workbook contains 4 group activities. Before each group activity, we will talk through the subject before breaking into groups to complete the activity and feedback.”

# Slide 2: What are our responsibilities in having conversations?

## NDIS Practice Standards

* **Rights and Responsibilities**
* Person – centred supports
* Support Planning
* Independence and informed choice
* **Governance and Operational Management**
* Complaints
* Continuity of supports
* **Provision of Supports**

## NDIS Code of Conduct

* **Act with respect for individual rights**
* **Support people to make decisions**
* **Enables people to understand information and make their will and preference known** by using the most appropriate form, language and manner to communicate
* **Takes into account people’s expressed values and beliefs**

## Notes:

**A possible opening statement could be:**

“Communication is an important part of all of our work, whether it is with the people we support, co-workers, managers or people outside our organisation. There will always be times when these conversations become difficult. How we manage these conversations is an important part of how we build relationships and support people.

As a NDIS provider, we also have an obligation, under the NDIS Practice Standards and NDIS Code of Conduct. For example, the NDIS Practice Standards and Code of Conduct tell us we must:

* Promote, uphold and respect participants’ legal and human rights, including their rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making, enabling people to exercise informed choice and control.
* Take into account people’s expressed values and beliefs.
* Ensure people have support plans which they were actively involved in developing, and which reflect their needs, requirements, preferences, strengths and goals.
* Support people’s right to choose, take risks and be actively involved in decisions.
* Provide information using the most appropriate language and mode of communication and that people are given time to review options and seek advice if needed.
* Ensure there is a supportive environment for any person who provides feedback and/or makes complaints.

Today we are going to focus on our own communication skills, how we engage with others, and how we plan to approach conversations which might be difficult or where a person might have a different view to our own.”

# Slide 3: Empathy

Before we begin, let’s take a couple of minutes on **Empathy**:

[RSA and Brene Brown video webpage](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw)

The four skills of empathy

* **Perspective taking**
* **Staying out of judgement**
* **Recognising emotions in other people**
* **Talking about / acknowledging those emotions.**

Reference: [Empathy Across Cultures – NDS webpage](https://www.nds.org.au/images/resources/person-centred/Empathy.pdf)

## Notes:

**Play the following video on Empathy to set the scene.** [Brene Brown Empathy webpage](https://youtu.be/1Evwgu369Jw?si=G4X2S1HiNW9hoW-h)

“As we move forward through this training, try to reflect on these 4 skills and as we reflect and work through the activities.”

* Perspective taking
* Staying out of judgement
* Recognising emotions in other people
* Talking about / acknowledging those emotions

# Slide 4: Conflict

## Notes:

**To be used alongside Team Workbook Group Activity 1 page 2**

**A possible script is:**

“Conflict is an unavoidable part of the work we do.

Conflict as a term has a stigma, but at its core, conflict is just when different people have different opinions on what should happen.

Seen this way conflict is not only unavoidable, but entirely natural and - if handled well - can be beneficial.

Conflict itself is not a problem, but our response to it can be.

Managed properly, conflict can be an opportunity for growth: it can shine a spotlight on issues that may have remained hidden. It can even strengthen relationships: a relationship that has not had to deal with challenges and difficulties is an untested relationship.

Of course – if not handled well, conflict can lead to resentment and even a complete breakdown in a relationship.

We all have different responses to conflict, and it is really important to be aware of how we personally respond to conflict.

Imagine you are in the middle of a difficult conversation with someone at work. It could be a conversation where someone is putting pressure on you to do something you don't think is a good idea. Perhaps you feel that your ability is being called into question or you are being blamed for something that wasn't your fault.

* What thoughts do you have?
* How does it make you feel?
* How might these feelings impact the interaction?

Let’s break into groups. Read through the Team Workbook scenario of **Group Activity 1 – How do we feel about conflict** and talk through these 3 questions.”

# Slide 5: In a difficult conversation, what might….

**Aggressive communication** look like?

* Getting angry, raising their voice
* Interrupting and talk over someone.
* Blaming or being critical of others.
* Insulting the other person
* Refusing to back down or listen to the other person

**Passive communication** look like?

* Being quiet all of the time
* Apologising when you haven’t done anything
* Agreeing to everything youre asked – even if it's unreasonable.
* Not expressing your point of view.

**Passive aggressive communication** look like?

* Making a backhanded compliment, for example: “I like your report, it’s almost as good as John’s”
* Pretending not to know about a previously agreed action
* Verbally agreeing, but communicating with body language that they don’t agree
* Not showing up to the conversation at all!

## Notes:

**To be used alongside Group Activity 2 – Facilitator’s Introduction – page 12.**

**A possible script is:**

“There are different ways we can respond to conflict: these include aggressive communication and passive communication. **Aggressive communication** is when we disregard what the other person wants. We believe we are 100% right, so our goal is simply to convince the other person to do what we want them to do.

**Ask the group**: In a difficult conversation, what might aggressive communication look like?

Answers may include:

* Getting angry, raising their voice
* Interrupting and talk over someone.
* Blaming or being critical of others.
* Insulting the other person
* Refusing to back down or listen to the other person

**Passive communication** is when we just want to end the conflict, and we’re willing to completely forget what we think is right, in order to please the other person. In passive communication we just do whatever it is the other person wants us to do.

**Ask the Group:** In a difficult conversation, what might passive communication look like?

Answers may include:

* Being quiet
* Apologising when you haven’t done anything
* Agreeing to everything the other person is saying – even if it’s unreasonable
* Not expressing your point of view

A third way people respond to conflict, is **passive aggressive**. When a person is passive aggressive, they may respond to interpersonal conflict very passively - agreeing to what the other person wants - but later act out aggressively in an indirect way.

Ask the group: In a difficult conversation, what might passive aggressive communication look like?

Answers may include:

* Making a backhanded compliment, for example: “I liked what you did with that report, it’s almost as good as what John did with his”
* Pretending not to know about a previously agreed action
* Verbally saying they agree, but communicating with their body language that they don’t agree to do something, but then not following through on it later, on purpose.

# Slide 6: Assertive Communication

* Practicing active listening.
* Acknowledging the other's emotions.
* Maintaining open body language.
* Using "I" statements.
* Keeping tone calm, patient and composed.
* Respecting personal boundaries.
* Seeking mutual understanding.
* Focusing on the issue, not the person.
* Offering constructive feedback.

## Notes:

**To be used alongside** **Group Activity 2 on Team Workbook page 3**

**A possible script is:**

A more productive way to respond to conflict is assertive communication. People sometimes think of assertive communication being the balance between aggression and passivity, but this isn’t right. Assertive communication is when we respect the other person’s right to choose what they do, while also remembering that we have the right to choose what we do. In this way, it’s fundamentally different to both aggression and passivity.

Assertive communication is about carefully listening to the other person's perspective, respectfully communicating our own perspective, and remembering that at the end of the day I am responsible for my actions and you are responsible for yours.

When conflict comes up, what are some things that can help you to communicate assertively?

**Answers may include:**

* Practicing active listening.
* Acknowledging the other's emotions.
* Maintaining open body language.
* Using "I" statements.
* Keeping tone calm and steady.
* Respecting personal boundaries.
* Seeking mutual understanding.
* Staying patient and composed.
* Focusing on the issue, not the person.
* Offering constructive feedback.

# Slide 7: Planning a difficult conversation

**Get the facts right**

* What are the facts and what are your assumptions
* Feelings and intentions

**Think about objectives**

* What is the problem
* What do you want to achieve
* How will you uphold the person’s rights

**Check any policies or guidelines which might apply**

**Prepare for the conversation**

* How, where, when?
* What will I say?
* How will I listen?

Tip: There is a big difference between planning and scripting.

## Notes:

**To be used alongside Team Workbook: Group Activity 3 page 4.**

**A possible script is:**

“Planning for a difficult conversation can help you to reflect and consider different possibilities. It can help you feel more prepared and focus on what your priorities are for the conversations.

It’s important not to script a conversation as you need to have the flexibility to respond to other’s thoughts and ideas.

Things to consider:

**Get the facts right**

* What are the facts and what are your assumptions?
* Feelings and intentions

**Think about objectives**

* What is the problem?
* What do you want to achieve?
* How will you uphold the person’s rights?

**Check any policies or guidelines which might apply**

**Prepare for the conversation**

* How, where, when?
* What will I say?
* How will I listen?

# Slide 8: Having a difficult conversation

**Step 0**

**Stop and check in: Are you calm enough to have this conversation?**

* What are your early warning signs?
* How can we excuse ourselves from a conversation?

## Notes:

**A possible script is:**

“When we are having a difficult conversation, we can increase the likelihood of it being a success if we remember the following steps.

**Step 0: Stop and check in: are you calm enough to have this conversation?**

If we're feeling emotional: there is a much higher chance of this conversation breaking down and harming the relationship.

Before we embark on a difficult conversation, we should check in to see how we are feeling. If we are not feeling calm and collected, we should avoid having the conversation at this time.

What are some signs we may detect in ourselves that would tell us that we are feeling emotional, and that we shouldn't have the difficult conversation at this time?

* Increased heart rate.
* Shallow, rapid breathing.
* Feeling agitated or restless.
* Difficulty concentrating.
* Tense muscles or clenching fists.
* Overwhelming urge to react immediately.
* Impaired judgment or clouded thoughts.
* Feeling defensive or overly sensitive.

Imagine you are about to have a difficult conversation but notice some of these warning signs. What would be a polite way to get yourself out of the conversation for now?

Ask for feedback from the group, some expected answers are:

* "Can we talk later? I need a moment."
* "Let's pause and revisit this conversation later."
* “I'd like to check in with my manager on this first.”
* "I need some time to think, let's reschedule."
* "I'm not ready now, can we reconvene later?"

# Slide 9: Having a difficult conversation

**Step 1**

**Establish a shared goal for this conversation.**

* Reframe it from 'me vs you' to 'us vs the problem’.
* What is the problem we both want to fix?

**Step 2**

**Get curious, ask questions**

* Open, non-judgemental questions.
* Active listening.
* Learn what they want and why.
* Summarise it back to them.

**Step 3**

**Communicate our position**

* Get consent first.
* Outline the non-negotiables.
* Develop creative solutions together.

## Notes:

**To be used alongside Team Workbook: Group Activity 4 page 7.**

**Step 1:** **Establish a shared goal for the conversation.**

Too often in difficult conversations the dynamic can become competitive. It can feel like the conversation has to have a 'winner' and a 'loser'. We need to avoid this at all costs, so we should reframe the interaction from 'me vs you' to 'us vs the problem’.

For example, imagine you are supporting a client to access the community: you believed the support was scheduled to start at 11am, the client thought the support was scheduled to start at 9am.

'Me vs you' would be trying to figure out who is right and who is wrong. 'Us vs the problem' would be working together to find a time that works and avoid miscommunication like this in the future.

Very often, taking a step back will help us to establish a shared goal. For instance, a client's parent may believe their child is ready to use public transportation independently, where you have concerns this could be unsafe. Taking a step back, however, you and the client's parent both want the client to be safe and as independent as possible. You still don't agree on everything, but now you have a shared goal to work towards.

Think of a shared goal for this conversation. This must be a goal that both parties would wholeheartedly agree with. Thinking about the work you do, supporting people with disabilities in accommodation settings and the community, what could be some "shared goals" you could establish?

Ask for feedback from the group, some expected answers are:

* Enhancing the individual's quality of life.
* Promoting a safe and supportive environment.
* Strengthening communication and understanding.
* Fostering independence and empowerment.
* Aligning on care and support strategies.
* Building trust and mutual respect.

**Step 2: Get curious, ask questions.**

Next, we need to really listen to the other person. We have two key goals here: we need to make sure we have accurately understood the other person's position, and we need to make sure they feel heard, respected and validated.

Here, we are trying to find out not just what they want, but also why this is so important to them. What are the underlying fears or desires that make this so important to them?

What can we do that will help this phase?

Ask for feedback from the group, some expected answers are:

* Listen actively without interrupting.
* Reflect back their main points to make sure we understood.
* Ask open-ended, clarifying questions.
* Show empathy and understanding.
* Avoid judgment or immediate solutions.
* Acknowledge their feelings and concerns.
* Summarise their perspective for clarity. Maintain eye contact and attentive posture.

**Step 3: Communicate our position.**

Once we are sure we completely understand what the other person wants and why, we can start to communicate our perspective. It may be helpful to ask for their permission to do this.

Of course, we want to be as helpful as we can be, but there may also be some hard lines in the sand we cannot cross. If they are asking us to break an organisation’s policy, disregard a manager's direct instruction or act unethically, we should communicate these non-negotiables respectfully but clearly. Always remember the golden rule of assertive communication: we are responsible for our actions and they are responsible for theirs.

Ultimately, our goal here is to come up with creative solutions that meet the needs of both parties. Think about 'why' they wanted what they want and try to think about some different ways to achieve this.

What should we remember to do in this phase?

Ask for feedback from the group, some expected answers are:

* Politely ask to share your perspective.
* Remember the limits of your role: defer to a manager when needed.
* Clearly express your own needs and limits.
* Respectfully explain non-negotiables and boundaries.
* Stay true to ethical and organisational standards.
* Be open to alternative solutions.

**Introduce the Team Workbook Group Activity 4 page 7.**

Ultimately, discussing how to manage difficult conversations will only get us so far. Eventually the best way to get better at this skill is to practice it: by doing roleplays.

# Slide 10: After a difficult conversation

* **Debrief**
* **Your rights and safety**
* **Responsibilties**

## Notes:

Go through this slide with your teams to let them know what support you have in place. Refer to your internal policies.

After a difficult conversation it’s important to:

**Debrief**

* Who are good people to debrief with? Best way for most people to process is to share. It’s how humans work – we need to feel understood/validated/normal. Coworkers, bosses, partners, family, mental health professionals.
* EAP

**Consider your rights and safety**

* If something has had an impact on you – recognize that and respect that
* Safety is really important
* We all have a right to feel safe.
* Don’t just carry on – talk to someone
* Safe is a subjective experience, nobody can tell you not to feel unsafe.

**Reflect**

* When the dust has settled, some process around reflecting is important - learning from our mistakes.

# Slide 11: For Further Information

These resources were developed as part of the NDS Sector Readiness project in January 2024.

For more information on the project and access to more free resources, visit our website at [NDS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness Project WA webpage](https://www.nds.org.au/resources/all-resources/wa-ndis-quality-and-safeguards-sector-readiness-project).

All these resources are free to access as a result of the continued support from Department of Communities.

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