

NDS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness Project

Key Conversations – Managing Difficult Conversations: Team Workbook

What is a key conversation?

A key conversation is a short, structured conversation based around a simple scenario. Key conversations can be used as thought starters to raise awareness of small groups of workers during routine meetings or during planned training.

Who is this for?

This Key Conversations workbook should be used alongside the facilitator guide. Depending on whether you are meeting online or face to face, it could be printed or emailed to support workers prior to training.

Group Activity 1 – How do we feel about conflict

Team worksheet

In your groups, read through the scenario, and think about how this might make you think, feel and what impact this might have.



Scenario

During your supervision, your manager raises an incident which you were involved in to have a debrief. The actions you took are being discussed and you are asked to consider what you might have done wrong. Your manager lists some of the things they think you could have done better. They don't really give you a chance to offer your explanation.

Team Response

1. What thoughts do you have?

Notes

2. How would that feel?

Notes

3. How might these feelings impact the interaction with the manager?

Notes

Group Activity 2 – Communication Styles

Team worksheet

In your groups, read through each statement, think about what type of communication you think it is, and rephrase the statement to communicate the same message in an assertive way.

Statement	Type of Communication Rephrased in an assertive way
<p>"If you don't follow my instructions exactly, you'll be reported to the supervisor and could lose your job."</p> <p>What communication style is this? How could you rephrase this?</p>	<p>Type of communication:</p> <p>Rephrase:</p>
<p>"You have done so well considering your level of experience, I am not surprised this huge error occurred, I am not sure how things didn't go wrong sooner".</p> <p>What communication style is this? How could you rephrase this?</p>	<p>Type of communication:</p> <p>Rephrase:</p>
<p>"I know we are all busy, but is it that difficult to get an incident report submitted? Everyone else can do it, why can't you?"</p> <p>What communication style is this? How could you rephrase this?</p>	<p>Type of communication:</p> <p>Rephrase:</p>
<p>"My shift was supposed to finish 30 minutes ago, but that's ok I can finish that job for you".</p>	<p>Type of communication:</p> <p>Rephrase:</p>

What communication style is this? How could you rephrase this?

Group Activity 3 - Difficult conversations

Team Worksheet

In your groups, read through the scenario below and make a plan for this conversation. Don't worry if you don't have the all the information you need, just fill in what you can.



Scenario

John is an adult who lives alone. You go to his house 3 times a week to provide supports to help him live independently. John has been having some problems with his neighbours. He doesn't like that they often play music out in the back garden until 9pm in the evening. On one occasion, this led to John shouting at his neighbour, and throwing some rubbish over the fence. On your last shift with John, as you were leaving, he told you that on the next shift, he wants you to go over to the neighbour's house and tell them to stop playing music in their back garden. If they don't listen, he wants you to call the Police. John explained that as his support worker, it was your job to protect him.

This sheet can be used to reflect and plan before a complex or difficult conversation.

Team response

1. Getting the facts rights

Question	Answer
What are the facts?	
Am I making any assumptions? - Intentions - Capacity	

What feelings is this conversation or situation creating for me?	
Have I done anything to contribute to this situation?	

2. Think about your objective

Question	Answer
What is the key problem?	
What is the impact?	
What other actions could I take?	
What do I want to achieve?	
How am I going to support the person and uphold their rights?	

3. Check policies and guidelines

Notes



Step 4: Preparing for the conversation

Question	Answer
How, when and where	
How will I ensure the person is supported? - Communication needs? - Cultural considerations?	
Where will we have the conversation?	
When will you have the conversation?	
What will I say?	
How will I establish a shared goal? - What problem do we both want to fix?	
What are the key points that I want to communicate? - Reflect on facts, not the assumptions.	
How will I listen?	
What questions could I ask to understand and explore? - Open, non-judgemental questions. - Active listening. - Learn what they want and why. - Summarise it back to them.	
How will I acknowledge and recognise the person's rights?	
How will I work on a solution?	
What are the non-negotiables?	

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect on why, are these actually non-negotiable | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|



The planning activity is adapted from [Difficult conversations - United Nations](#). It is designed to assist people to think through a conversation before they have it.

Group Activity 4 - Role Play Scenarios

Preparation

Pair Up: Divide yourselves into pairs. If there's an odd number, a group of three can work, with one person acting as an observer.

Scenario Assignment: Each pair will be given a roleplay scenario. Read only the information for the role you will be playing.

Find role play scenarios on pages 9-12.

Roleplay Instructions

- 1. Roles:** Decide who will play the role of the support worker and who will play the role of the client (or client's family member, where applicable).
- 2. Take a minute to understand the scenario:** Read the scenario and perspectives (client or support worker) for your allocated role.
- 3. Objective:** The aim is to simulate a difficult conversation, staying true to the perspectives outlined in the scenario. It is up to the support worker to work through each of the following steps:
 - ✓ Step 0 | Stop and check in: Are you calm enough to have this conversation?
 - ✓ Step 1 | Establish a shared goal for this conversation.
 - ✓ Step 2 | Get curious, ask questions.
 - ✓ Step 3 | Communicate your position.
- 4. Be a good roleplay partner.** This should be a difficult conversation, but not unrealistic. We're all learning.
- 5. Time Limit:** Each roleplay should last for about 10 minutes to ensure that you have time to explore the scenario but also to leave time for reflection.

- 6. Reflection:** After the roleplay, spend a few minutes reflecting on the exercise together. Consider the following questions:
- Did you feel heard and understood?
 - Were there moments of tension? How were they resolved?
 - Were the person's concerns adequately addressed?
 - Did the worker manage to communicate their point of view effectively?
- 7. Next:** Swap roles and complete the exercise again, with a different scenario.

Role play scenario 1 – Worker’s perspective

Situation

In an accommodation setting for individuals with disabilities, a new client, Alex, is saying they want to get McDonalds for dinner as a treat each Friday. Alex has diabetes and this choice conflicts with the nutritional plan set by Alex's dietitian, which recommends avoiding fast food which is high in fat. The support worker, Jordan, is aware that dietary changes need to be carefully managed and balanced with Alex's health requirements. Both Alex and Jordan are preparing to discuss this matter.

Worker’s perspective

Jordan, the support worker, is anxious that if they do not follow the dietary plan and Alex has any issues as a result, then they would be blamed. Jordan is worried that this is just Alex's way of trying to push the boundaries, and that if Jordan agrees to this, next he will want McDonalds two nights per week. Jordan thinks that ensuring Alex's health should be the priority and is worried that Alex might not fully understand the health consequences of ignoring the dietary recommendations.

Reflection

After the roleplay, spend a few minutes reflecting on the exercise together. Consider the following questions:

- Did you feel heard and understood?
- Were there moments of tension? How were they resolved?
- Were the person’s concerns adequately addressed?
- Did the worker manage to communicate their point of view effectively?

Role Play scenario 1 – Person being supported perspective

Situation

In an accommodation setting for individuals with disabilities, a new client, Alex, is saying they want to get McDonalds for dinner as a treat each Friday. Alex has diabetes and this choice conflicts with the nutritional plan set by Alex's dietitian, which recommends avoiding fast food which is high in fat. The support worker, Jordan, is aware that dietary changes need to be carefully managed and balanced with Alex's health requirements. Both Alex and Jordan are preparing to discuss this matter.

Person's perspective

Alex feels strongly that they should eat MacDonalds once a week. They've tried changing their diet previously, but they were never able to maintain it 100%. Alex strongly believes if they get to treat themselves every now and then, then they will be able to maintain a good diet within the dietitian's recommendations for the other 6 days per week. Alex is worried the staff will just think he's being greedy and will be dismissive of this. Alex is prepared to explain why this change is so crucial and is hoping for support and understanding from the staff.

Reflection

After the roleplay, spend a few minutes reflecting on the exercise together. Consider the following questions:

- Did you feel heard and understood?
- Were there moments of tension? How were they resolved?
- Were the person's concerns adequately addressed?
- Did the worker manage to communicate their point of view effectively?

Role play scenario 2 – Worker's perspective

Situation

Sarah, a young adult with severe ID, is scheduled to move to a new, more specialised home next month. Her mother, Mrs. Thompson, has been instrumental in her care and is deeply involved in Sarah's life. One staff member in particular - Mike - knows Sarah well and will be moving with her from her current home to the new home, to help with the transition. Two weeks before the move, Sarah calls Mike expressing serious concerns about the move.

Worker's perspective

Mike, the support worker, initially believes that Mrs. Thompson's apprehension about the move might be due to her overprotectiveness and difficulty in letting go. He thinks that Mrs. Thompson might not fully appreciate the enhanced care and opportunities that the new facility offers. Mike's focus is on reassuring her about the quality of care and the benefits for Sarah, but he may not fully understand the depth of Mrs. Thompson's emotional concerns and the need for a more empathetic understanding of her perspective.

Reflection

After the roleplay, spend a few minutes reflecting on the exercise together. Consider the following questions:

- Did you feel heard and understood?
- Were there moments of tension? How were they resolved?
- Were the person's concerns adequately addressed?
- Did the worker manage to communicate their point of view effectively? Provide feedback to peers.

Role play scenario 2 – Parent's Perspective

Situation

Sarah, a young adult with severe ID, is scheduled to move to a new, more specialised home next month. Her mother, Mrs. Thompson, has been instrumental in her care and is deeply involved in Sarah's life. One staff member in particular - Mike - knows Sarah well and will be moving with her from her current home to the new home, to help with the transition. Two weeks before the move, Sarah calls Mike expressing serious concerns about the move.

Parent's perspective

Mrs. Thompson is feeling extremely anxious about the move. She worries that Sarah might not receive the same level of care and attention in the new facility. Having been the primary caregiver for so long, she is concerned about how Sarah will adapt to a new environment and new caregivers. Mrs. Thompson feels a mix of guilt and apprehension; she wonders if the move is more for her own convenience rather than Sarah's benefit. She wants to make sure that Mike understands her fears and that Sarah's best interests are at the heart of this transition.

Reflection

After the roleplay, spend a few minutes reflecting on the exercise together. Consider the following questions:

- Did you feel heard and understood?
- Were there moments of tension? How were they resolved?
- Were the person's concerns adequately addressed?
- Did the worker manage to communicate their point of view effectively?

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.