



Having Hard Conversations Tip Sheet

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USE "I STATEMENTS":

- When sentences are started with "You..." this tends to increase defensiveness in others. Using sentences that begin with "I feel..." is more effective.

AVOID "ALL-OR-NOTHING" PHRASES:

- Words such as **always**, **never**, **every time** etc. tend to increase debate and are usually exaggerations.

FIND THE RIGHT TIME TO TALK:

- Difficult conversations tend to be more successful if not brought up in the heat of the moment.

REFLECT AND CLARIFY WHAT YOU HEAR:

- Check in with the other person to make sure you are understanding them correctly.
- "What I am hearing you say is that you feel...is that correct?"

USE THE RIGHT TONE:

- The meaning of words changes based on the tone of voice used, choosing the right tone matters if you want to be heard and understood. Sometimes how you say it is just as, if not more, important as what you say.

STAY ON TOPIC:

- Emotional conversations can easily lead people to bring many topics at once, but hard conversations are best when only one topic is addressed at a time.

NOTICE YOUR OWN DEFENSIVENESS:

- When you begin to feel defensive, you may tend to stop listening to protect yourself or even go on the attack. Being mindful of your own emotions, and how it impacts the effectiveness of the conversation matters.

TAKE A BREAK IF NEEDED:

- If the conversation is escalating, feel free to take a mutual break. If neither person is listening or feeling heard, it will not be a healthy, productive conversation. The key is agreeing on when to return to the conversation and following through.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY, WITHOUT INCLUDING "BUT...":

- In most hard conversations, both parties have some responsibility. Take responsibility or apologize with a simple statement such as "I am sorry that I hurt you." Remember not to include the phrase "but..." after the statement because it invalidates the apology.

REMEMBER TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE POSITIVES:

- Say thank you, acknowledge the work someone is doing, and acknowledge the other person's feelings. This helps the other person to feel seen and heard.