

Preparing your REAL DIALOGUE

My difficult conversation is...

Step 1: Set the Context

CPR: What do you need to talk about?

Content: A single instance (e.g., "You were late with this project.")

Pattern: Repeated occurrences (e.g., "You've missed three deadlines in a row.")

Relationship: Underlying trust issues (e.g., "Your lateness affects my trust in you.")

FACTS FIRST What is the reality, or what is really going on? What are the undeniable **facts** that neither party will dispute?

YOUR STORY What is your initial interpretation of what is going on, what are you telling yourself about this situation?

Step 2: Challenge Your Own Interpretation

“What am I pretending not to notice about my role in the problem?”

Thinking about the other person; “Why would a reasonable, rational, decent person do this?”

“What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?”

Step 3: Align your Intention.

What do you really want for yourself?

What do you want for the other person?

What do you want for the relationship?

What do you want for the bigger picture?

What will you choose to do?

Conducting your REAL Dialogue

1. Ask to have a conversation with the other party, explain the purpose and context of what you would like to discuss at the higher level of your intention and the outcome you would like to focus on during the discussion.
2. Confirm that your positive intention for the conversation is understood by the other party.
3. Agree a suitable time and location.

Starting the Dialogue

During the dialogue following the **R.E.A.L.** steps to keep your message clear, ensure mutual engagement and to stay on track with agreeing reality, exploring possibilities and creating outcomes.

R. Reality – facts over opinions

What are the real facts and observations that you are noticing?

I noticed/ observed/saw....

State the undeniable facts and align on the reality of the situation before moving on.

E. Emotions – your perspective

Share your interpretation and perspective and how you feel about this and what it means for you. Own it by making sure you use “I” and “me”.

Share how this makes you feel, how you are interpreting what is going on, what this means from your perspective and the impact it is having on you and others.

Use phrases such as: “I feel ... when ... happens,” “It seems to me that...”; “It makes me feel....”; “One way of interpreting this is....” “For me, it creates ... impact on you and others.” “This is what it means to me ...” “This is how I see it...” “From my perspective ...”

A. Ask – for their perspective.

Actively listen with full attention on what the other party is saying to show you are interested in and genuinely want to understand their perspective.

“How do you feel about this?” “What does this mean for you?” “What is your experience?” “Can you help me understand?” “Tell me more about this?” “What is going on for you?” “What is happening for you?”

Avoid giving or asking for a solution or talking about something needs to be fixed at this stage. Hear the other party out. Understand what is going on for them. Do not judge and make assumptions, distort information and delete what is really going on. Do not generalise about them and their personality such as: “This is what is wrong about this” “You’re not doing this properly.” “You’re too ...” “You’re not being ... enough.”

Remember to clarify:

After you’ve heard their perspective, clarify what you heard to ensure you have understood their perspective and build even more respect for taking great pains to be clear about their point of view:

“Could you clarify that further for me?”

“So, what you’re saying is.....?”

“If I understand you correctly, you’re saying ...?”

“To clarify, this is your understanding of the situation ...?”

“When you say ... do you mean?”

“Could you elaborate / be more specific on ...?”

Keep on clarifying until you are sure of mutual understanding. Your job is to bring the dialogue to a point where all parties are fully aligned on the reality of the situation; aligned on the facts, the emotions, the stories and the impact of what is happening.

When you understand, thank them:

“Ah, I see now. Thank you.”

“Now I understand. Thank you.”

L. Lead – an agreed outcome

Once the other party has given their perspective and you all clearly understand what is going on for you both, lead the discussion to an agreed best outcome. You can facilitate this discussion using the GROW coaching model or if you don’t need to go into this level of detail you can agree at this stage what will be actioned, by whom and by when:

“Are we on the same page?”

“So, we both agree that this needs to be done ...”

“To summarise, this is the outcome we agree upon ...”

“You agree to action [X] and I’ll do this ...”

“What else do we need to include?”

“What (further) questions are there?”

“Let’s review on ... [date].”

Remember to find a way to thank them for talking and for taking the time to focus on the win-win outcome.”

Prepare an opening REA statement for your discussion

1. Reality – what are the facts as you see them that everyone involved is likely to agree as facts?

2. Emotions – this is how it seems or feels for me. (Remember to use ‘I’ and ‘me’ statements and be clear that this is your perspective, and this is open to interpretation e.g. I feel ... when this happens”. What interpretation will you share first?

3. Ask – for their perspectives and interpretations; What is going on for you? Can you help me understand? What is your experience? What questions can you prepare to use?

4. Lead – agree an outcome / use the GROW coaching model to discuss what you both want and how to get there. What is the best possible outcome for you right now?

What to do if the dialogue breaks down?

Accept that things may not go to plan and as you were expecting or hoping for. Sometimes the other party can give you information that you did not know and is a surprise to you, or they may refuse to participate. Other times they could totally disagree with what you think could be a good win-win outcome.

Be sensitive to the other party's emotions, body language, gestures and what they are not saying. Notice awkward silences and read between the lines if you feel the other person is leaving something out; they are not telling you the full truth; or they're not being totally open with you.

Be prepared for different reactions. If they start to defend themselves and verbally attack you take a breath and pause before you respond. What is most important is to ensure mutual respect before moving further into solutions and outcomes.

You may need to stop the dialogue and agree to reflect on what has been discussed and reconvene later, when you've both given it more thought. It could be that you:

Apologise: "Apologies, or I am sorry, it was not my intention to upset you, it was my intention to ..." (Restate your intention).

Takes steps to create for mutual respect: "I care about you / this situation and I want to find a way forward that works for both of us."

Go back to finding out what matters most:

"What is most important for you right now?"

"What is important for me right now is..."

"What do we agree is important for both of us?"

Agree to Respectfully Disagree

It is easier to agree than disagree and what a wonderful world it would be if we all agreed on everything. And that is not how it is.

Remember we have our own values, thoughts and differences of opinion which can lead to disagreements. The important thing is to know how to agree to disagree and still be respected for it. There is a big difference between simply disagreeing and disagreeing respectfully. Outright disagreements lead to hurting people's feelings and upsetting one another to the extent of having a disharmonious relationship that lacks trust and openness.

When you know how to disagree respectfully, it can still be a productive conversation that leads to new thoughts and ideas. We can learn a lot from different perspectives and disagreements as long as we can listen to the other party, understand what they're saying and respond in a rational way.

Unfortunately, many of us either avoid disagreements or lose it when things do not go our way.

Tips to Keep Disagreements Respectful and Constructive

1. Recognise the good and what could be true in what the other person is saying and why they are disagreeing.
2. Use I or me statements rather than you which will make you sound more argumentative e.g. "I feel when this happens" rather than "You make me feel when you do this ..."
3. Do not make it personal or emotional about the other party – make it logical.
4. Emphasise reasoning and information to support your disagreement.
5. Do not put them down, attack or use derogatory comments about their opinions, beliefs, behaviours and actions, instead focus on why you feel the way you feel.
6. Never raise your voice or yell at the other person.
7. Listen and really get to objectively understand why they disagree with your point of view.
8. Do not interrupt the other person or think about why you disagree with them, or what you will say next, while they are still talking – keep listening.
9. Repeat key words they use to show you are listening and then state your case that highlights where you disagree with them.
10. Be curious and calm about the discussion which is easier said than done when you feel angry, disappointed, or passionate about something. Stay rational and objective to stay on track.

At the end of your discussion:

Know when you need to move on by establishing if you can both move things forward from where you are or agree to break off the conversation for now and do this at a later mutually convenient time:

"So, let's agree to disagree about ..."

"I'll do this and you'll do this ..."

"Your opinion is this ... and mine is this ..."

Remember that respect goes beyond difficult conversations. Being respectful, helpful and considerate at all times in both your working and non-working relationships establishes a strong foundation for when we might disagree. It helps us overcome disagreements through collaboration of what we jointly agree on and respectfully agree to disagree on.

GROW the way forward

GOAL

What is most important for us right now?	What do we have to solve right now?
What is our best possible outcome?	What objective can we agree to?
What is our goal right now?	What is the best thing for us now?
What do we need to achieve?	How do we define our best vision or opportunity?

REALITY

What is stopping us?	What are we risking?
What makes this difficult?	What would make this easier?
How excited are we about this?	What have we missed?
Who else really needs to be included?	What might distract us from succeeding?
What do we like, or is positive today?	What don't we like, or what is not working?
What can we do to make sure this will happen?	What can we do more of to ensure we reach our goals?

OPTIONS

What are all our options?	If we made a list, what are all the things we could do to move forward?
What is our best plan of action?	What else needs to happen?
What are our resources?	Who else do we talk to? Who else can help?
What are we confident we can do?	How will these actions contribute to our goals?

WAY FORWARD

What are our agreed actions?	Who will do what and by when?
What is the first step?	How will we follow up?
What are all the next steps?	When will we talk again?