

Constructive Conversations

We all want to be heard and understood. When our views are taken into consideration, even if we agree to disagree, it's more likely we will feel respected, and it builds trust. Problems occur when one person in a conversation feels ignored, misheard, or talked over. Here we look at the skills needed for creating constructive conversations.



HELPFUL TIPS:

What is a Constructive Conversation?

Some conversations require more attention and preparation time than others. We need a conversation to be constructive when we are anticipating we could encounter difficulties – such as when we need to be assertive, deliver feedback we believe might not be taken well, or need to have a conversation with a person who may be demanding or aggressive.

A constructive conversation consists of listening with care to what is being said, aiming to understand the other person, giving praise when appropriate, talking in a way that builds the relationship, and aiming towards getting outcomes at the end of the conversation. These ways of talking help build psychological safety. It's non-judgmental, empathetic, and it feels positive and motivating.

Steps towards a Constructive Conversation

- ▶ **Preparation and Planning:** Decide what you want to achieve. Check your facts. Prepare what you want to say – writing down the dot points you want to cover can be helpful. Check that the time and place are suitable for the conversation – will it be too noisy, is there a lack of privacy? Check your mindset is one of aiming towards as positive an outcome as possible, and that you are managing your emotions – breathe!

▶ Initiating and having the conversation:

How you approach the person is important – for example, “There’s something I’d like to talk with you about. When would be a good time to do this?” Then during the conversation, aim for clarity and be concise.

- ▶ The Center for Creative Leadership offers a three-part model for structuring the start of a constructive conversation. Outline the Situation, “During this morning’s meeting...”, then you describe the Behaviour, “...you interrupted me and others...”, and then the Impact, “...and as a result, some people felt shut down and didn’t get a chance to express their ideas.”
- ▶ Next, invite them to reflect – “I’m curious what you saw happening at this morning’s meeting?”
- ▶ Actively listen to what they say and explore solutions, making clear the behaviours you prefer
- ▶ Conclude and clarify follow-ups, “Can we agree that...”

Constructive Conversations require preparation, active listening, clarity, collaboration.

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