

# Dealing with Conflict

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# What can make a conversation difficult?

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- When we feel our self-esteem is at risk
- When the issues are important and the outcome is uncertain
- When we care deeply about the topic
- When we care deeply about the other parties to the conversation



# When facing a difficult conversation, what is our purpose?

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- To deliver a message
- To prove a point
- To give them a piece of my mind
- To get them to do what I want



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“Delivering a difficult message is like throwing a hand grenade...there's not way to throw a hand grenade with tact or to outrun the consequences.”

*Difficult Conversations*, pp. xvii – xviii.



# Common (False) Assumptions

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- Harmony is normal; Conflict is Abnormal
- Conflict is a Communication Breakdown
- Conflict is Pathological
- Conflict should be Avoided or Reduced
- Conflict result of Personality Clash

# A Difficult Conversation Framework

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**FIVE STEPS THAT CAN  
GET YOU STARTED**

# Step 1. Prepare by walking through the 3 conversations

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- The “what happened?” conversation
  - Explore all sites of the story
  - Don't assume that you know the other party's intentions
- The feelings conversation
  - Leaving feelings out of the conversation won't make them go away
  - Unspoken feelings= materials stored under pressure
- The identity conversation
  - In this conversation, what is at stake for me about me?
  - What do you need to accept to be better grounded?



## Step 2. Check your purposes and decide whether to raise the issue

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- Check your purposes
  - What do I hope to accomplish by having this conversation?
- Decide whether to have the conversation
  - Is this the best way to address the issue and achieve my purpose?
  - Is the issue really embedded in my identity conversation?



## Step 3. Start from the third story

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- Describe the problem as the difference between your stories. Invite joint exploration of the problem.
- Share your purposes
  - To better understand their perspective
  - To share your own perspective
  - To talk about how to go forward together
- Invite the other party to join you as a problem solving partner



## Step4. Explore their story and yours

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- Listen to understand their perspective on what has happened
  - Ask questions; acknowledge feelings
  - Paraphrase to see if you have all the info
  
- Share your own point of view
  - Talk about where you think each story may come from



## Step 5. Move to problem-solving

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- Gather information
- Invent options that meet each party's most important concerns and interests
  - Separate the process of inventing options to selecting options
- Talk about how to keep the communication open as you move forward



# How to regain your balance during the conversation

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- Don't assume that you can control the other party's reaction
- Prepare for a variety of responses
- Ask for a break to reflect on what you've heard

Ref: Difficult Conversations