

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.