

# Difficult Conversations in the Workplace: How to Effectively Prepare for a Successful Conversation

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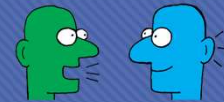
## Disclosures

- Mindy Hamilton- none
- Dana Fuhrman- NIDDK of NIH, Award Number K23DK116973

## Learning Objectives

- Describe and discuss difficult workplace conversations
- Learn and apply techniques to **prepare** for the conversation
- Learn and apply techniques to **have** the conversation

## Conversation examples



- Day to day conversations that affect our work lives
  - I want a promotion, but I was overlooked
  - I have to discuss lack of personal hygiene with a trainee
  - The nurse manager of my clinic is often late
  - I suspect substance abuse in my trainee
  - I feel that a colleague of mine is shirking their duties and putting extra work on me

## Why are these conversations difficult?

- Potentially embarrassing topics
- Disbelief or denial from the receiver
- High stakes, if discussing remediation or promotion
- May be a hierarchy involved
- Relationship may be at risk
- Emotions from both sides



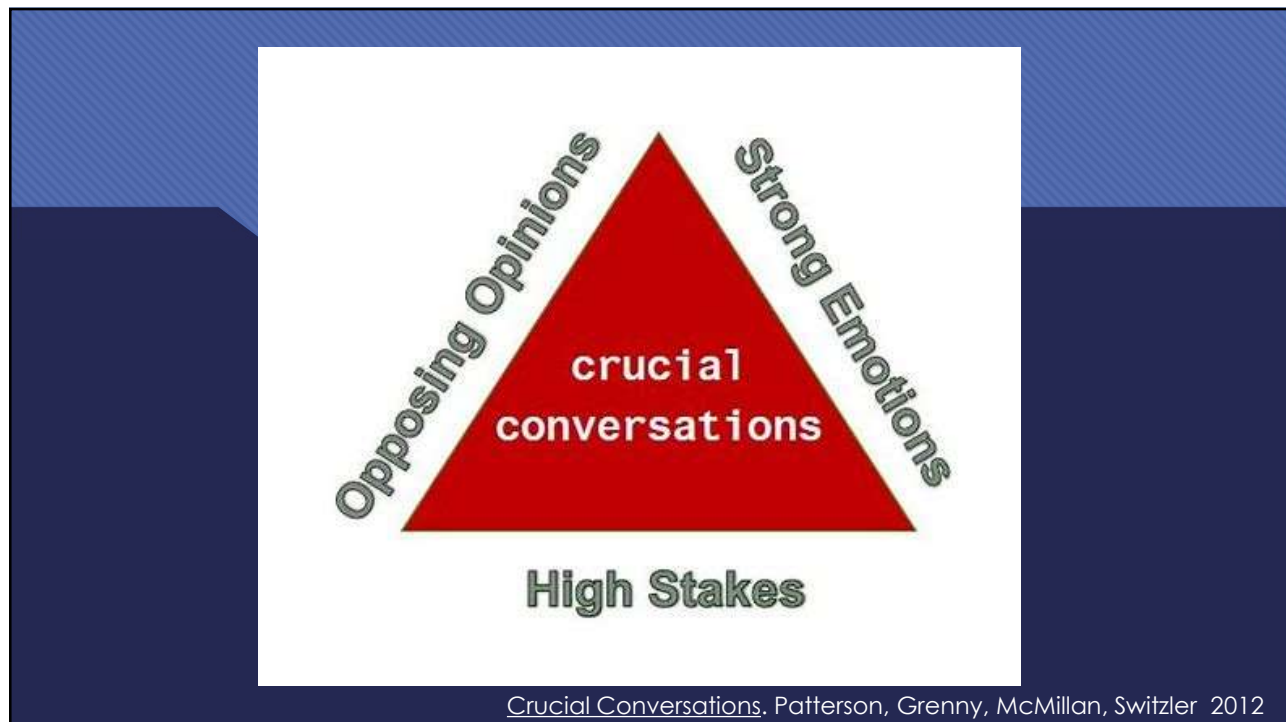
## Why are these similar/different from parent/patient conversations?

### Similar

- High stakes
- Emotions can be very high
- Want to maintain relationship
- No one is at their best
- May be uncertainty

### Different

- Person may or may not be aware of the issue
- You engage on a different level
- Power base is different
- You will likely have a continued relationship with this person



## Today's Skills

- Start with Heart
- ASK-TELL-ASK
- Combine skills in faculty-led demonstrations

PATTERSON, K. (2012). *Crucial conversations: tools for talking when stakes are high*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

## Start with Heart....



- Prior to the conversation
  - Manage your emotions and get to cognitive frame of mind
- Begin a high risk conversation with the right motives
  - What do you want for yourself, the other person, and the relationship?

PATERSON, K. (2012). Crucial conversations: tools for talking when stakes are high. New York, McGraw-Hill.

## Preparing – Reflect on..

**The Situation:** Describe in neutral terms

- What is the problem as you see/experience it?
- Where is common ground?

## Preparing – Reflect on..

### Self:

- My stress reaction?
- My goal?
- How I do want to be in the conversation?

## Preparing – Reflect on..

### The Other:

- Assume is unaware or well-intentioned
- Recognize you do not know what's going on for them
- Anticipate stress response

## Small Group Discussion

Large Group Discussion- Questions  
on Self-Reflection Exercise?

## ASK-TELL-ASK

- **ASK**
  - Invitation to discuss the issue
  - Use "I" statements
- **TELL**
  - Identify the problem
  - State the problem using facts and not emotion
- **ASK**
  - What is their perspective?
  - How do they see this issue?



## End Well and Make a Plan

- **End well**
  - Conclude the conversation
  - Be prepared that it may not actually end with goals accomplished
  - Keep emotions in control
- **Make a Plan**
  - Next steps?
  - Provide support for future
  - Work on solutions
  - Maintain relationship





## ASK-TELL-ASK Example

- **ASK**
  - Dan, I wanted to talk with you about something that has come to my attention. Do you have a minute?
- **TELL**
  - Two of the female fellows feel uncomfortable that you often put your arm around them while on clinical service.
- **ASK**
  - I would like to hear your perspective on these concerns.

## End well and Make a Plan- Example

- **End Well**
  - Dan, I appreciate you taking these concerns seriously and for being open with me. Thank you for changing these behaviors.
- **Make a Plan**
  - I'm happy to meet again in a few weeks. You are a great clinician and I value your contribution to the fellowship.

## Key Phrases-Initial Ask

- I'd like to discuss something with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes? I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_ with you and get your point of view.
- I'd like to talk about \_\_\_\_\_. I think we may have different ideas on how to \_\_\_\_\_.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about \_\_\_\_\_. I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.
- I wanted to talk with you about \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_ (why is it important; common ground)
- "I saw, noticed, I heard \_\_\_\_\_" (objectively describe, observed, changeable behavior)
- "I am \_\_\_confused, surprised, uncertain, frustrated\_\_\_" (name own state of mind, emotion)

## Faculty Demonstration

- **Roles**
  - Conversation initiator
  - Conversation partner
- **Activity**
  - Faculty demonstration of cases
  - Large group discussion

## Tips and Reminders....

- A successful outcome will depend on two things: how you present yourself and what you say..
- Acknowledge the emotion, both yours and theirs...Know and return to your purpose at difficult moments.
- Use "I" statements
- Don't assume your conversation partner can see things from your point of view and think about their point of view
- Practice the conversation with a friend before holding the real one

Adapted from Judy Ringer *We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations* , Judy Ringer, <https://www.judyringer.com/>.

## Resources and Thank You

- Crucial Conversations. Tools for talking when stakes are high (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed). K Patterson, J Grenny, R McMillan, A Switzler. 2012; McGraw Hill.
- Difficult Conversations. How to discuss what matters most. D Stone,, B Patton, S Heen. 1999; © Douglas Stone, Bruce M. Patton, Sheila Heen; Penguin Books
- Failure to Communicate. How conversations go wrong and what you can do to right them. H Weeks. 2010; © Holly Weeks; Harvard Business School Publishing
- We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations , Judy Ringer, <https://www.judyringer.com/>.
- Dianna Ploof, Dena Hofkosh, Rick Saladino, Sylvia Choi , Evelyn Reis and Ana Radovic

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