

Engaging in a Direct Conversation

Use this document as a guide for having direct and respectful conversations with colleagues in your workplace when a concern arises.

Part 1: Preparing to Approach the Other Person

Prior to engaging in a conversation, take some time to assess your emotional safety and reflect on the situation. Having a conversation about something that impacted you negatively can be emotional. Taking some time to manage those emotions prior to engaging in a conversation can help ensure that the conversation is productive and respectful. It is also important to assess whether addressing the issue directly feels appropriate given the context and the relationship. If you do not feel safe approaching this person alone, consider seeking support.

To help guide your preparation, consider the following questions:

- Do you feel safe speaking directly to the other person?
- How did the situation you want to discuss make you feel?
- What exactly bothered you?
- What are your needs and interests? What about the other party?
- What are you hoping comes out of this conversation? Consider possible solutions to your concern(s) keeping in mind the other party's interests.

It may be helpful to write down your thoughts and bring them to the meeting. Using "I" statements will allow you to focus on your experiences and needs rather than assumptions. For example, instead of saying "you made me feel ...," try "When you did X, I felt Y."

Part 2: Preparing for the Conversation

1. Approach the other person respectfully and ask them if it is a good time to have a conversation with them about your concern
 - a. Keep it simple and straightforward at this point: "I wanted to talk to you about what happened yesterday. Can we find a suitable time and place?"
 - b. If they agree, find a suitable location and time where you feel comfortable
 - i. Choose a safe and neutral space (a space where you both are comfortable and won't be interrupted or distracted)
 - c. If they are okay to have the conversation at that moment, pause to check in with yourself
 - i. Notice how you are feeling emotionally and if you feel prepared
 - ii. If you do not feel ready, it is okay to suggest meeting at a later date and time
 - d. If they are not available or disagree, suggest a few dates and times that work for you or ask them if there is a more suitable time

Part 3: Engaging in the Conversation

Once you are ready to engage in the conversation, use the following steps to help guide you:

1. Start the conversation by clearly stating what you would like to talk about
 - a. “Today, I’d like to discuss what was said on June 5. I want to talk about what was said, why it was said, how it made me feel and how we can move forward.”
2. Describe the situation
 - a. Focus on the specific behavior and use I statements to explain the impact on you
 - b. Avoid making assumptions about their intentions
 - c. Listen actively to their perspective
3. Work together to find solutions on how to move forward
 - a. Suggest possible ways to move forward
 - b. Consider both your needs and the other person’s interests

Conversations like these can be difficult. Consider how you would like to handle it if you or the other person starts to get stressed. Some good examples:

1. If you are continuously being interrupted
 - a. Take a deep breath
 - b. Let the other person know that they will have a turn to talk after you finish
 - i. “Please let me finish this thought and then I will listen to you”
2. If the other person is yelling or has raised their voice
 - a. Remain calm and avoid raising your voice
 - b. Use “I” statements to explain how this is coming across
 - i. “I can’t hear what you are saying when you raise your voice”
 - ii. “I would like to continue this conversation, but we need to be respectful”
3. If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe
 - a. If you feel the matter is escalated and you feel unsafe, exit the conversation
 - b. Use “I” statements to explain how you feel
 - i. “I am not comfortable having this conversation right now”
4. If you are unable come to an agreement together
 - a. Recognize when the conversation is no longer productive
 - b. Suggest taking a break or involving support if that would be appropriate
 - c. You may say:
 - i. “It seems we are not reaching an agreement, so maybe we can revisit this at a later time.”