

Difficult Conversations: The Three Conversations

Listen to Respond

Listen to Understand

A Battle of Message		A Learning Conversation
Assumption 1: I know all that I need to know to understand fully what happened.	<p>The “What happened?” conversation.</p> <p>Our challenge: the situation is more complex than either person alone can see.</p>	Assumption 1: Each of us is bringing different information and perceptions to the situation. There are likely to be important things that each of us does not yet know.
Goal 1: Persuade the other(s) that I am right.		Goal 1: Explore each other’s stories, including how each of us understands the situation and why.
Assumption 2: I know what the others intended, meaning that I know why they said what they said or did what they did.		Assumption 2: I know what I intended, and I know the impact the others’ actions had on me. I don’t know, and can’t know, what’s in their head.
Goal 2: Let the other(s) know what they did was wrong.		Goal 2: Share the impact of the others’ actions on me and find out what they were thinking. Also ask what impact I’m having on them.
Assumption 3: The situation is all their fault. (Or it’s all my fault)		Assumption 3: We have probably both contributed to this mess.
Goal 3: Get them to admit blame and take responsibility for making amends.		Goal 3: Understand the contribution system: how our actions interact to produce this result.
Assumption: Either feelings are irrelevant and wouldn’t be helpful to share, or my feelings are their fault and they need to hear about them and make me feel better.	<p>The feelings conversation</p> <p>Our challenge: the situation is emotionally charged, for each of us.</p>	Assumption: Feelings are the core of the situation and are usually complex. I may have to dig a bit to understand my own feelings.
Goal: Either avoid talking about feelings completely or really let them have it!		Goal: Address feelings, both mine and theirs, without judgments or blame. Acknowledge feelings before problem solving.
Assumption: Each of us is either competent or incompetent, good or bad, loveable or unlovable. There is no in-between.	<p>The identity conversation</p> <p>Our challenge: the conflict we experience affects</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) how we view ourselves, 2) how we view others, and 3) how we think others view us. 	Assumption: There may be a great deal at stake psychologically for both of us. Each of us is complex, and neither of us is perfect.
Goal: Protect my all or nothing self-image.		Goal: Understand the identity issues on the line for each of us – each of us wants to be seen as a whole human being.