

HR'S

complex conversation



toolkit

Ensuring constructive conversations with employees on potentially challenging topics begins with creating a psychologically safe environment. Here are some tips to help you develop trust and navigate complex topics with influence.

1 PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

- Think about your objective – what do you want to achieve with this conversation?
- If you feel any discomfort going into it, identify the source of this feeling. It's also important to consider how the other person might be feeling.
- Gather the facts and relevant documents, so you're not making any assumptions
- Practise your key points (but don't over-prepare: you need to be willing to adapt the conversation based on the other person's response).

Starting the conversation

Pick the appropriate moment and communicate the intent of the conversation to the employee beforehand, so they don't feel ambushed. Remember this mantra: clear is kind.

Some helpful conversation starters include:



2 TREAT IT AS A DISCOVERY SESSION

Complex – and sometimes difficult – conversations should always be treated as a two-way conversation. Avoid speaking *at* someone and making assumptions about them. Instead, treat the conversation as a discovery session to learn more about their perspective and any factors that may be contributing to the issue at hand.

Here are some questions to help you see their perspective:



What was your intention?



How do you see it?



What's at stake for you?



What lead you to say that?



This is what I'm hearing you say. Is that right?



What would help us to get on the same page?



Do you feel you've been given enough information/resources to succeed?

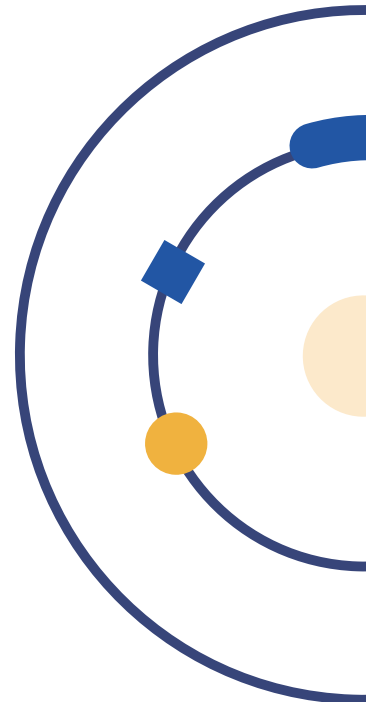
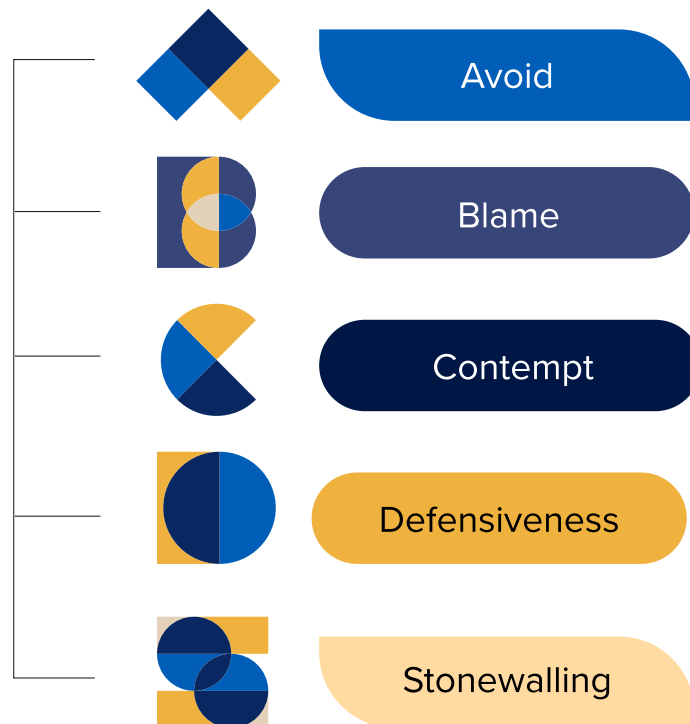


Is there anything going on that we haven't yet addressed or that I need to know?

3 COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

- Verbalise your intentions for the conversation
- Lead with curiosity and compassion
- Allow yourself to be other-focused rather than self-focused
- Pause to give the other person time to reflect
- Speak in specifics. E.g: “When XYZ happened, you responded like A and B. That didn’t work, but let’s talk about why that might have been the case.”

LEARN YOUR ABCDS



4 ACTIVATE THE RIGHT LISTENING STYLES

Listening well is the most important aspect of navigating complex conversations. Switching between the four types of listening styles can help you adapt your approach as the conversation progresses and learn more from the person you're speaking with.



RELATIONAL LISTENING

How can I form a meaningful connection here?



ANALYTICAL LISTENING

What are the facts?



CRITICAL LISTENING

Are there any gaps?
Can I trust what is being said?



TASK-FOCUSED LISTENING

What needs to be done?
How do we get there?

5 CONVERSATION AFTER CARE

- Pair difficult feedback with tangible steps to move forward with
- Provide access to safe, supportive spaces and resources for employees to help them change their behaviour/approach
- Follow through with next steps and set up a time to check back in if necessary.



REFLECT

- What happened?
- How am I feeling?
- Did I meet my goals for the conversation?



ANALYSE

- What went well?
- What didn't?
- What could have been phrased better?



SELF-CARE

- Do I need more support and if so, where can I go?
- What can I do to relax and lift my mood?



PLAN

- What do I need to do now?
- What things that are within my control can I change?



Learn how to manage complex conversations at work with [AHRI's short course](#).

AHRI members can access this course at a discounted rate.

SOURCES

[Forbes](#)
[Fair Work Ombudsman](#)
[Stanford Graduate School of Business](#)
[Harvard Business Review](#)
[HRM Online](#)
[American Psychological Association](#)