



Shari Robertson, Ph.D. CCC-SLP

ASHA Fellow
2019 ASHA President

TODAY'S AGENDA

A. Introduction and Hello

B. Difficult Conversations Toolbox

Do It Now

Adopt a Mindset of Inquiry

Assume your Assumptions are Wrong

Preserve the Relationship

C. Step by Step Guide to Difficult Conversations

Prepare

Engage

Forward to the Future

When Things Go Sideways

E. Take Action!

FIND FULL HANDOUTS at
www.dynamic-resources.org
Click on "free resources" tab

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHO...

do I need to talk with?

WHY...

is this conversation necessary?

WHAT...

is the desired outcome of this conversation?

HOW...

do power dynamics impact this conversation?

**WHERE
& WHEN..**

will this conversation take place?

WHAT...

will be your opening line?

LEARNING CONVERSATION SUMMARY

MUTUALLY AGREED UPON SOLUTION

ACTION STEPS	BY WHOM	BY WHEN

FOLLOW UP CONVERSATION PLANS

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Beare, K. (2019). *Difficult Conversations. The Art and Science of Working Together*. Pop the Bubble Press.

Cloud, H. & Townsend, J. (2015). *How to Have Difficult Conversations. Gaining Skills for Honest and Meaningful Conversations*.

Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (1999). *Difficult Conversations. How to Discuss What Matters Most*.

Robertson, S. (2019). *I Used to Have a Handle on Life, But it Broke: A Light-Hearted Guide to Serious Stress Management*. www.dynamic-resources.net

(Information on Dealing with Difficult People and General Stress Management)

KEY TAKE AWAYS:

- 1) Adjust Your Mindset (Difficult Conversations become Learning Conversations)
- 2) Preserve the Relationship
- 3) Listen Authentically
- 4) Tell Your Story
- 5) Brainstorm Collaborative Solutions
- 6) Identify next steps and timeline

ASHA 2023


Can We Talk?

Managing Difficult Conversations for Supervisors (and everyone)

Shari Robertson, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

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**Final Report
Knowledge, Skills and
Training Consideration
for Individuals Serving
as Supervisors**
ASHA, 2013



AMERICAN
SPEECH-LANGUAGE-
HEARING
ASSOCIATION

2

Goal: "... guide and support the learner through hands-on clinical training with the goal of developing clinical and professional knowledge and skills."


- Engagement in difficult conversations, when appropriate, regarding supervisee performance
- Develop supportive and trusting relationship with supervisee
- Create an environment that fosters learning and exploration of personal strengths and need

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Today we will: Learning Outcomes

- Identify the desired outcome of a difficult conversation
- Discuss the steps in initiating and managing difficult conversations
- Develop an action plan to manage difficult conversations in your professional setting

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Difficult conversation are difficult!

And inevitable

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Part A: Your Toolbox



- ✓ Do It Now
- ✓ Adopt a Mindset of Inquiry
- ✓ Assume Your Assumptions are Wrong
- ✓ Preserve the Relationship
- ✓ Don't Play the Blame Game

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#1 Do It Now

Don't Play the Avoidance Game


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How we play the avoidance game

- Don't speak up when someone has trampled on your professional or personal self esteem
- Allow others to take advantage of you
- Rationalize those who are behaving badly
- Think it's someone else's job
- Convince ourselves that it will get better on its own (it won't)

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Complain to someone else about the person with whom you are in conflict




(DON'T DO THIS.....EVER!)

9

Intellectually, we know this...BUT

- OFear
- ODiscomfort
- O"Too busy"
- ODon't want to hurt intern's feelings
- ODon't know how to start...or end



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Avoidance of a difficult task or conversation is a really bad strategy – especially for supervisors

11

Because that little problem...


Rapidly becomes a BIG problem.



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And It Keeps Getting BIGGER....

- O"Temperature" is raised – you likely get angrier and less able to manage the conversation
- OWorkplace/Relationship has become more toxic
- OOther person has continued problematic behavior unchecked.
- OYour stress levels go through the roof.



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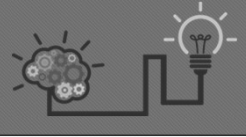
tomorrow
(noun)

a mystical land where 99% of all human productivity, motivation and achievement is stored

**BUT!
We don't procrastinate for things we enjoy or are good at!**

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#2 Adopt a Mindset of Inquiry



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You identify a problem/behavior that needs to be changed



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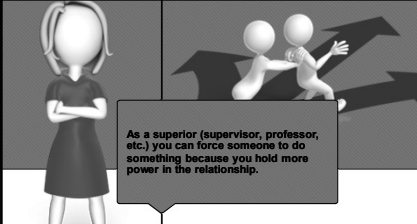
You can't force others to change by insisting that they change

FACT




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As a superior (supervisor, professor, etc.) you can force someone to do something because you hold more power in the relationship.



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BUT THIS IS MERELY A SHORT-TERM SOLUTION THAT MAKES YOU FEEL BETTER

- It does not solve a problem or help a student (or colleague) move toward less self-destructive or professionally inappropriate behavior.
- It does not provide students with a model for managing difficult conversations.
- Does not result in lasting change

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Those with more power (leaders/supervisors) have a responsibility to model positive conflict management skills!




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Learning Conversations



Reframing Difficult Conversations



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Difficult Conversations become Learning Conversations

when we seek to find out the other person's story and perspective rather than simply changing their behavior.

Frame your conversation as your opportunity to move from certainty to curiosity.

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Move from a "Change Conversation" to a "Learning Conversation"

- Engaging in a conversation to learn, listen, and understand often DOES result in change
- People are more likely to change when they feel heard and respected.

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Bottom Line

People are more likely to change when they are free not to.

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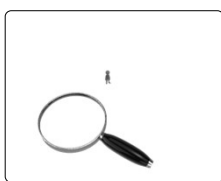
#3 Assume Your Assumptions are Wrong



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Intentions are Complex

We often make the mistake of assuming we know the other person's intentions based on the IMPACT of their behavior on us.




(Because we interpret their behaviors through the lens of our own intentions)

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Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

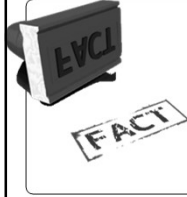
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A Learning Conversation helps us discover the other person's story and uncover their true intentions.



Now, we can move forward to solve the problem rather than wasting our time laying blame, proving we are right, or basking in our own smug self-righteousness


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People don't engage in difficult conversations with people with whom they have no relationship.

29

Because they aren't difficult



- Even providing bad news is not particularly difficult if you have no connections to the other person

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#4 Preserve the Relationship

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Be mindful of the other person's dignity

- Preserving the dignity of the other person isn't just "nice."
- Shaming, demeaning, or running roughshod over a supervisee (or anyone) will not fix the problem,

32


The moment someone perceives disrespect, their behavior during the interaction becomes about defending their dignity.



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Suspend Judgment

- Try to view the conversation as if you were a neutral third party.
- You may be upset, angry, or disappointed but give them the space to change by suspending your judgment.



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If you truly are investing in solving the problem.....



you need to accept that the other person's perception is their reality.

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#5 Don't Play the Blame Game



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Ditch the Blame

- Injures relationships and causes pain and anxiety.
- Makes YOU feel better but destroys potential for future relationship and collaboration.
- Inhibits our ability to learn the real cause of the problem and/or to do anything meaningful to correct it.

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Part B: Your Step-by-Step Guide to Conquering Difficult Conversations

COURAGE

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Step I: PREPARE

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KNOW YOUR MISSION

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe we will just shoot a couple astronauts up there in a rocket and see what happens."

Said no Nasa Scientist EVER.

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EVALUATE THE SITUATION

- Think carefully about what is bothering you.
- Consider if your actions or behavior could be causing any of the conflict.

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Plan Your Difficult (Learning) Conversation

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHO...

WHY...

WHAT...

HOW...

WHERE & WHEN...

WHAT...

© 2009 DII

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WHO DO I NEED TO TALK WITH?

OHINT: The answer is not "someone other than the person with whom I am in conflict."

O Writing down the person's name is the first step to helping you overcome avoidance

O (Now it's a plan!)

DIFFICULT CONVERSATION BLUEPRINT

WHO...

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BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF ON THE WHY

OSometimes a perceived conflict is more about what's going on in your head, in your life, and inside you than what's going on between you and someone else.

OIn this case, a conversation with someone else is not going to be productive

WHY...

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WHAT IS THE DESIRED OUTCOME?

O Next, search in yourself and determine what a successful outcome of this conversation would look like.

O How would a "successful" conversation end?

WHAT...

45

GOLD STANDARD of OUTCOMES




MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

"Preserve the Relationship"

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HOW DO POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT THIS CONVERSATION?



HOW...

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HOW DO POWER DYNAMICS AFFECT THIS CONVERSATION?




OSLP versus classroom teacher
 OSupervisor versus student/intern
 OChair versus faculty

OAdministration versus staff
 OFamily member versus professional
 OStudent/Client versus professional

HOW...

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Be Aware of your "Power"



O A Learning Conversation can be successful regardless of power dynamics.
 O But, as a supervisor, you need to realize you hold the vast majority of the power
 O So, you need to be especially careful not to abuse this power...

HOW...

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WHERE AND WHEN WILL THIS CONVERSATION TAKE PLACE

O Commit to a date that you will undertake this conversation and **WRITE IT DOWN.**
 O If appropriate, consider inviting the other person to meet at a neutral location (Write this down, too).

WRITE & WHEN...

50

WHAT WILL BE YOUR OPENING LINE?

O Your Opening Line sets the tone for the rest of the conversation.
 O The time you spend in developing a strong opening line substantially improves your chances that you will achieve your desired outcome.

WHAT...

51

OPENING LINES ARE IMPORTANT!

O "I was very concerned by what you said in the IEP meeting. That was inappropriate and unprofessional."
 O "You continue to ignore the comments I made on this intake report. Why haven't you addressed them?"

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The Implicit Message

What the other person "hears"

Aware of My intentions	Unaware of Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

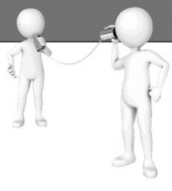
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	Aware of	Unaware of	
	MY INTENTIONS	Other person's intentions	
	Others person's impact on me	MY IMPACT ON THE OTHER PERSON	

54

WHAT YOU SAY:

"I was very concerned by what you said in the IEP meeting. That was inappropriate and unprofessional."



55

WHAT YOU MEAN

I want to make sure you understand how to communicate effectively in professional settings.

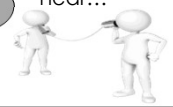
Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

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"I was very concerned by what you said in the IEP meeting. That was inappropriate and unprofessional."

You are not ready to be a professional.

What they hear...



Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

57

"I was very concerned by what you said in the IEP meeting. That was inappropriate and unprofessional."

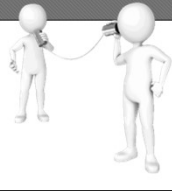
I DON'T FRIGGING CARE WHAT YOU THINK

At best you are not ready to be a professional SLP or Audiologist. At worst you are just an idiot.

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WHAT YOU SAY (to your intern):

"You continue to ignore the comments I made on this intake report. Why haven't you addressed them?"



59

WHAT YOU MEAN

I really want to make sure you understand how to write an evaluative report in the short time we have to work together.


Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

60

"You continue to ignore the comments I made on this intake report. Why haven't you addressed them?"

You don't have what it takes to make it in this program.

What they hear...



Aware of	Unaware of
My intentions	Other person's intentions
Others person's impact on me	My impact on the other person

61

"You continue to ignore the comments I made on this intake report. Why haven't you addressed them?"

You don't have what it takes to make it in this program.

??

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MELTDOWN

Tears, Hysterics, Calls Parents, Complains to Supervisor, Complains to Dean, Withdraws from Program, Trashes you on Social Media...

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Build an Effective Opening Statement Operate from a Neutral Perspective

Acknowledge positive intent → Shared responsibility → Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly → Mutual benefit

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Opening Statements Reframed

Acknowledge positive intent → Shared responsibility → Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly → Mutual benefit

○ *I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work. I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together. Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.*

65

Opening Statements Reframed

Acknowledge positive intent

○ *I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. (There are still some areas that need work.)*

I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together. Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.

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Opening Statements Reframed

Shared responsibility

I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work.

○ *I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. (Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together.)*

Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.

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Opening Statements Reframed

Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly.

I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work. I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together.

○ *Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.*

68

Opening Statements Reframed

Offer an invitation to explore the issues jointly.

I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work. I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together.

○ *Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow so we can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.*

69

Opening Statements Reframed

Mutual benefit

I know you have been putting a lot of time into your reports. There are still some areas that need work. I think perhaps my written feedback wasn't clear enough. Perhaps it might be more efficient if we spent a little time talking about it together.

○ *Let's set aside 20 minute after school either today or tomorrow SO WE can be sure you understand and can apply this when you are on your own.*

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Step 2: ENGAGE

You have mapped out your strategy, not its time to execute your plan.

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3 Parts of a Learning Conversation

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Start with your well-rehearsed opening line...."

- Envision the conversation
- Take a deep breath
- Modulate your tone and expression to signal discussion not inquisition; exploration not punishment. (PRACTICE)
- PLUNGE

73


Listen Authentically

Be Genuinely Curious. Hear their story.



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SHUT UP and LISTEN



- Use Active Listening... Authentically!
- Establish eye contact
- Maintain neutral positive expression
- Employ minimal encouragers – don't interrupt
- Be mindful of your non-verbals – and theirs
- If necessary – occasional reflective statements**
- Be comfortable with silence
- Be prepared for strong emotions

75

Tell Your Story

Your Turn

But, only when they are finished telling theirs

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What to talk about

- Share impact of the situation/behavior on you
- Explore potential impact of your previous experiences
- Take responsibility for your contribution
- Describe feelings

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Feelings Matter

- Your feelings will show themselves whether you consciously invite them to the party or not.
- Unexpressed feelings leak into difficult conversations
- Unexpressed feelings block the ability to listen – which requires an open and honest curiosity about the other person and willingness to keep the spotlight on them.
- Better to just say how you feel (without being a complete jerk about it) and move on

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Revisiting Blame



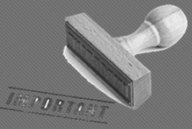
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Don't play the Blame Game

- Blame is about judging – looks backward "Who's to Blame?"
- When blame is the goal, understanding is the casualty
- Focusing on blame hinders problems solving
- When supervisees (or anyone) are accused, they will do what accused people do....

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- **Blame does not solve the problem**

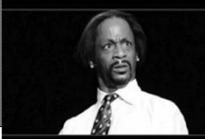


- **Blame can leave a bad system or process in place and undiscovered**

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PLUS it does NOT support a psychologically safe workplace!

THAT FACE YOU MAKE WHEN YOUR CO-WORKER TRIES TO BLAME YOU FOR THEIR MISTAKE



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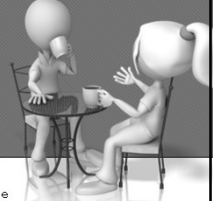
Step 3. FORWARD TO THE FUTURE



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The Contribution Conversation

The Alternative to the Blame Game




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Shift to the Contribution Conversation


- Goal is not to assign blame. Goal is to understand what happened so we can improve how we work together in the future.
- How did we each contribute to the current situation?
 - (How did we get ourselves into this mess?)
- What do we do differently going forward
 - (How do we get ourselves out of this mess?)

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The contribution conversation looks FORWARD at problem solving.....



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rather than BACK at blame.


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Invite a collaborative solution

- Brainstorm options that meet each side's most important concerns and interests.
- Create mutually agreed upon action steps
- Ensure that both parties leave the conversation knowing what will happen next
- Establish a way to keep communication open to determine when steps are completed.

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Write it Down!




LEARNING CONVERSATION SUMMARY		
MUTUALLY AGREED UPON SOLUTION		
ACTION STEPS	BY WHOM	BY WHEN

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Regaining Your Balance

If things start to go sideways...




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Let go of Trying to Control their Reaction

○ Don't measure success of a conversation based on whether or not the other person gets upset.

○ Instead, give them space to be upset, take responsibility for any part you have in the problem, show compassion, work together to move forward.




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Reframe the conversation

○ Reframing is taking the essence of what the other person says and turning it back to the core of the conversation.

○ "I'm right, you're wrong. That's all there is to it."

○ *You obviously feel very strongly about your perspective, but I'd like to share mine as well.*




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Reframe the conversation

○ "I don't see why I have to sign out tests when I'm bringing them right back. Don't you trust me?"

○ *I understand that you don't see the need to sign out tests. I would like to help you understand the reasons for following this protocol.*



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Use "yes, and..." statements

○ Validates your view of the situation and that of the other person.

○ Allows you to work at understanding the other person's point of view without giving up your own.

○ *"YES, I understand that you walked away from that meeting feeling disrespected and unheard AND I walked away feeling dismissed and confused."*

○ This allows you to move to the collaborative stage.

○ *"Now that we understand each other, what's a good way to resolve this problem?"*

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Nullify Roadblocks ("thwarting behaviors")

○ Be alert for behaviors that are designed to thwart the conversation.

○ Stonewalling, Playing the Victim, Blaming, Redirecting.

○ Use Assertive communication – label the behavior, bring conversation back to the core of the topic at hand.

○ *"It's difficult for me to understand your point of view when you are trying to place the blame on someone else. Remember, our goal here is to make sure you have the skills you will need to be a professional SLP."*




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Take a break

○ If all else fails, excuse yourself to gather your composure or take a brief cognitive break.


○ Re-schedule or schedule a second meeting if you feel depleted, bogged down, or there is too much to tackle in one meeting.



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Learning Conversations Dos & Don'ts

Let's sum things up



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Learning Conversations "Dos"

○ Talk to the person with whom you are in conflict – not to someone else!

○ Adjust your Mindset


○ Preserve the Relationship/Build Trust

○ Listen to Their Story

○ Tell Your Story

○ Brainstorm Collaborative Solutions

○ Agree on next steps and timeline



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Learning Conversations "Don'ts"


○ Avoid difficult conversations (student needs your expert input)

○ Play the power card (or use it very sparingly)

○ Try to persuade, impress, trick, outwit, convert, or win over the other person.

○ Forget to listen authentically

○ Violate trust relationships



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