

Challenging Conversation Guideline for Behaviour Change Dr B Mann 2026

1. Initiate face-to-face or phone call re the need to arrange time to talk.
2. Consider venue – usually a neutral venue eg. cafe, as opposed to your office
3. At the venue
talk about other unimportant/less important things first, usually briefly.

If the person has no indication that there is a difficult topic to discuss,
ask permission to talk about whatever the issue is.

OR

(preferable) If the person has been prewarned that there is an issue to discuss,
Consider giving a brief affirmation first, then raise the issue.

Try to express your concern in relation to a goal that the other person wants,
Start with, ***I am concerned that...*** *your desire to have a long term relationship/have more friends/get a job, have the group function effectively etc is being undermined by ... (the problem)*

4. Ask the person, *I wonder what your thoughts are about that?*
5. Connect through empathy not collusion, including for example, *This is a difficult/hard for you to hear/uncomfortable conversation for us to have.*
6. 'I' statements vs 'you' statements: *I am concerned that...I feel*
7. Address power dynamic – *We all make mistakes or **we all have things to learn** - me too.* Also, you might say, *I've been on the receiving end of difficult conversations too.*
8. Discuss and agree on the way forward/next step
9. Finish on the positive, eg affirmation or an encouragement.
10. Afterwards, consider what follow up is needed to encourage, affirm, reassure. Sometimes no follow up is required but usually something will be appropriate. Eg It might even just be a hand on the shoulder when you are going past when you next see the person at work/church etc.