

Crucial Conversations

This handout helps you plan for a *crucial conversation* - a conversation with a person or group about an important matter that presents problems or barriers to success for you, your students, and/or your school. By spending time planning, you can be better prepared and ready for a conversation that otherwise could be emotional, heated, and off track. Take notes below to prepare.

The issue is:

Describe the problem in one or two sentences. Brevity helps to bring forward clarity.

It is important because:

Define the impact of the problem. How, exactly, is it affecting your/your students'/your school's ability to succeed? *Be specific and use facts* to show the impact of the problem. Also say what the *future impact* will be if it is not resolved.

My assumptions about the facts are:

Write down what you assume is going on that is causing the problem. You will not likely tell the person these assumptions—but get them down on paper to see if they make sense to share, or if they are simply assumptions that are not relevant to the situation. These assumptions may change with the conversation. Be ready to ask about them as open-ended questions, rather than stating them as facts. (e.g., “How do you feel about the arts in our school?” rather than “You don't seem to value the arts.”)

I have already tried to:

Describe what steps you have taken to correct the situation. Include what you have witnessed that the other person/group has also done to correct the situation.

I am hopeful that:

State your wish to resolve the issue. Express good will and positive reinforcement where possible.

Ask probing questions to understand their view of the problem:

Use what you wrote in the first four boxes to create probing questions to explore with the other person/group. Try to keep them based in fact, reflecting respect to the person/group and their efforts.

My ideal outcome of the conversation is:

Articulate what you hope will be the immediate result of the conversation. Also note what the long-term solution looks like to you before having the conversation. This might also be different after talking.

Expectations for the conversation:

Create best, worst and okay scenarios for how the conversation will go. Describe how you can stay centered and calm if each of the scenarios happen.

Best:

Worst:

Okay:

Getting to “Best”:

Describe you plan to set up the conversation to maximize getting to the “best” scenario, including where to have it, what time of day, how much time to give it, and how to schedule it.

Reminder: Be ready for this conversation to take place over several points in time. One or both of you might need to step away to reflect before completely finishing the conversation. The conversation may take place a few times over the course of a day, or a few weeks.