



Say the Hard Thing:

HOW TO HAVE THAT DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

“There are no classes in life for beginners,” wrote poet Rainer Maria Rilke. *“Right away you are always asked to deal with what is most difficult.”*

Saying the hard thing can be one of the most difficult things we ever do. And for many of us, just thinking about doing it can cause worry, fear and stress. The good news is that getting these conversations right has more to do with planning and practice than saying “just the right thing.” And when we dare to broach these hard topics with other people, there are often hidden rewards.

THE BENEFITS OF SPEAKING UP

Difficult conversations have the power to get you what you really want from life. They can clear the air between you and someone else. And they can give your self-esteem a real boost.

Revealing how you really feel and what you really want is a life-long practice that sets you up for more good things to come. Regardless of what happens or how the other person responds, making your true self visible will only make you stronger, healthier and more at peace with yourself.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR A PRODUCTIVE CONVERSATION

- 1. Bring it up.** It’s wishful thinking to hope that the other person will broach a hard topic. In some cases, he or she may not even be aware of the need. That means, like it or not, it’s up to you.
- 2. Be clear on your intention.** Are you discussing a sensitive topic to make a decision, reveal what you’ve already decided, make a request, or something else? Being clear about why you are having the conversation and what you hope to get out of it ...will help you frame what you’re about to say.
- 3. Be mindful of your mindset.** Sidestep the tendency to blame and assume you know exactly what is going on. Leave room in your frame of mind for discovery and revelation. Stay curious. Remember how much you care for the person, and envision how you’d like your relationship to be after the conversation.
- 4. Rehearse.** It can helpful to practice your conversation by writing in a journal or talking it through with a trusted friend, coach or therapist. This will help you become more familiar with your feelings and point of view. It will help you relax before you say the hard thing.
- 5. Set the tone: Use “I” messages.** “You” statements tend to assign blame. For example, rather than saying, “*You hurt my feelings,*” it is better to use an **“I” message** and say, “*I feel hurt.*” If you’re afraid, say what you’re afraid of at the beginning of the conversation. For instance, “*I’m scared that you won’t like me anymore, or that you’ll go away, or that we won’t be friends anymore after this conversation.*” Then take a deep breath and begin.

Saying the hard thing is like any other exercise: **every time you do it, you’re building muscle**...and your hard work will unquestionably pay off in more meaningful relationships in the end.

