



Tackling **difficult** conversations

**Your quick-start guide to tackling
tough workplace conversations
with confidence and respect**



1) Why this matters

You're not alone

In a Breathe webinar poll, managers told us their top three toughest conversations are:

65%

Dealing with personality clashes in their team

41%

Saying "no" to their manager or colleagues

35%

Disagreeing with their manager

The common issue? Most difficult conversations start as communication problems. Handled well, they can build trust, solve problems early, and improve team morale. Handled badly (or avoided), they can fester and damage relationships.

Watch the full on-demand webinar: [L&D: how to become an effective and communicative manager](#)

2) Conversation planning template

Step 1 - Define your goal

What outcome do I want from this conversation?
What does "success" look like for everyone involved?



Step 2 - Gather the facts

What actually happened? (Be specific, avoid assumptions)
How is it affecting the team, business, or individual?



Step 3 - Consider the person

How might they see this situation?
Is there a preferred time or setting to talk?



Step 4 - Plan your approach

Open with context (why we're talking)
Share the impact (how it affects work)
Suggest next steps (what to do differently)



Tip

Write your opening line in advance - it will help you start clearly and calmly.

3) The respect check

Before you start, ask yourself:

Is it factual?

Stick to what happened, not who they are.

Is it relevant?

Focus on what impacts the work, not personal preferences.

Is it timely?

Don't let issues fester - address them as soon as possible.

Is it constructive?

Offer a way forward, not just criticism.

Is it respectful?

Speak as you'd want to be spoken to - firm but fair.



Remember

Difficult conversations aren't about "winning" - they're about moving forward.

4) Avoid these common pitfalls

1. Overestimating the conversation

You overthink it, dread it, and avoid it.

👉 **Result:** The problem grows and relationships strain.

How to avoid:

- Break it down into facts and desired outcomes.
- Have the conversation before it snowballs.

2. Underestimating the conversation

You "wing it" and speak without considering the other person.

👉 **Result:** They feel blindsided, defensive, or unheard.

How to avoid:

- Pause to plan.
- Consider their perspective before you speak.



5) Quick-start script

Opening:



"I wanted to talk about [situation] because it's having an impact on [team/business]. I'd like us to figure out a way forward together."

Middle:

- Share your facts.
- Explain the impact.
- Ask for their view.

Close:



"Let's agree on [next step] and check in on [date/time] to see how it's going."

Final note for managers

Difficult conversations are part of your role as a leader. Handled well, they show you care enough to address problems and respect your team enough to be honest.

Next step

Great conversations don't stop when the meeting ends - they're skills you build over time. With **Breathe's Learn add-on**, you can:

- ✓ **Access bite-sized training on handling tricky conversations**
- ✓ **Build your confidence with manager-focused learning tracks**
- ✓ **Help your team grow by making learning part of everyday work**



[Grow your conversation skills with Breathe Learn](#)