

A Path Forward



**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING  
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Partners for Better Communities

DHCD is committed to creating safe, affordable and prosperous communities to live, work and do business in Virginia.





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AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A Path Forward

# FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS SUCCESSFULLY

*Through Shared Engagement*

Partners for Better Communities

# Overview

- What is a *Difficult Conversation*?
- Examples
- OARRS
- Facilitator's Role
- Manage the discussion – TALK
- Bad turn...group activity
- Close the discussion



# What is a DIFFICULT CONVERSATION?

A difficult conversation is one that is hard to initiate, contains sensitive information, and must be conducted without heightened emotions.

# Examples of Difficult Conversations

- Firing someone
- Suspending someone
- Sexual harassment issue
- Respect issue
- Saying 'no' to an idea or proposal
- Financial issues
- Conflict between two employees



# BEGIN WITH the OARRS

- **Outcome**
- **Agenda**
- **Roles**
- **Responsibilities**
- **Scope**



# THE FACILITATOR'S ROLE...

- ✓ Helps establish effective group behavior through ground rules, an agenda, and various group processes
- ✓ Helps build trust among group members
- ✓ Helps members learn effective behavior for improved group process
  - Remain neutral
  - Keep silent on content issues
  - Stay emotionally uninvolved
  - Become invisible when the group is managing itself
  - Stay out of the spotlight





# THE FACILITATOR IS NOT SOMEONE WHO...

- ✓ Is involved in the task or issue being examined
- ✓ Is able to freely express her/his opinion on the issue or topic
- ✓ Has a stake in the decisions made
- ✓ Has decision making authority in the group
- ✓ Is an arbitrator or judge ( the group itself is responsible for the decisions it makes and for resolving its own conflicts)

# FACILITATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

## What Should the Facilitator Know?

- What is the issue or topic of this conversation?
- What do I know about the situation? What are the facts?
- What kind of decision is to be made?
- What information is needed prior?
- How much processing time is needed with the information?
- Are the different types of information available being considered?
- Are there time constraints?



# SET THE STAGE

1. Describe the purpose and reason for the discussion
2. Provide a framing question for the discussion
3. Make it clear that the space is free of judgement
4. Allot a specific amount of time for the discussion
5. Begin the discussion by responding to the framing question

**RULES**  
of ENGAGEMENT

# DISCUSSION/CONVERSATION

- Every voice that wishes to be heard should be heard in full
- Provide an opportunity for those who wish not to verbally communicate to provide their ideas in a different format anonymously
- Participants should be mindful to share from their perspective and not provide judgement or analysis to the words of another person

## 4 mental shifts

*that make it easier to have a*

### **Difficult Conversation**

|                                |   |                               |
|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| “Difficult person”             | ➔ | “Difficult situation”         |
| Advocating for your position   | ➔ | Advocating for your interests |
| Be proven right                | ➔ | Be effective                  |
| Change their personality/style | ➔ | Change their behavior         |

# QUESTIONS for CONSTRUCTING the CONVERSATION

- “Tell me more about...”
- “This is what I heard you say...is it what you meant?”
- “What led you to this point of view?”
- I notice your passion about this issue: What makes this so important for you?”
- “Can you say that in another way?”
- “I’d like to offer another point of view...”
- “I’m wondering if you have some thoughts or feelings about what you’ve been hearing?”
- “If what you’re proposing came to pass, how would things be different?”

# Difficult Conversations: RACE...

## Five Successful Strategies:

1. Understand your racial/cultural identity
2. Acknowledge and be open to admitting your racial biases
3. Validate and facilitate discussion of feelings
4. Control the process, not the content
5. Validate, encourage, and express admiration and appreciation to participants who speak when it feels unsafe to do so



# Difficult Conversations: TALK...

- **T** – Think about framing how you think about the conversation differently. Don't label it as 'difficult'. It may be about a tricky subject but, by suggesting solutions or alternatives, you can focus on constructive outcomes
- **A** – Always use clear, simple and neutral language. Refer to specific examples and facts
- **L** – Listen to what the other person is saying and hear their point of view. Show you care about how they see things
- **K** – Keep the focus on the issue, not the person



# DON'T BE AFRAID OF SILENCE

- Silence is not a bad thing...it can signal thinking and reflection. It's not personal
- Participants can share as they are ready and will not be called on
- If nothing is shared in the allotted time for the discussion, provide another opportunity to return to the discussion





# Why Difficult Conversations Take a Bad Turn...

## Group Activity

Predictable response:

Not-so-great reaction:

A better response:



# Difficult Conversations: What Not to Say...

- "Don't interrupt me!"
- "You need to be more professional."
- "Okay, since you feel so strongly about this we can talk about it a little longer."
- "My family didn't own slaves!..." "I resent you calling me white..."



# CLOSE DISCUSSION

- Ensure consensus and resolution
- Be clear on what decisions were agreed upon
- Know the next steps
- Plan a follow up if needed
- Close the conversation by acknowledging everyone's presence
- Celebrate success
- Provide an opportunity to continue the discussion 1:1 if requested.



# What Are Your Tips & Strategies for Managing Difficult Conversations?



# Resources

- <https://cruciallearning.com/newsroom/>
- <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/324223>
- <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/312519>
- <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/229827>
- <https://businessfoundations.com.au/how-to-manage-a-difficult-conversation/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OiEmTWZVOb8>
- <https://www.icslearn.co.uk/blog/posts/2020/november/12-tips-for-handling-difficult-conversations-at-work/>



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