

Difficult Conversations

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Learning Outcomes

- ▶ 1) Participants will discuss different types of difficult conversations (conflict, crisis, classroom management/academic integrity, and general well being concerns).
- ▶ 2) Participants will discuss strategies for effectively addressing difficult issues with students.
- ▶ 3) Participants will demonstrate their ability to begin a difficult conversation with students.

Setting the scene

2011 Study

The higher Education Quality Council of Ontario

- ▶ 3,536 completed surveys based on 1,964 individual students were received
- ▶ 60.9% reported having a diagnosis of one or more mental disorders.
- ▶ Mood (37.5%) and anxiety (24.6%) disorders were the most prevalent
- ▶ 67.7% of students exhibited academic challenges (most frequently difficulties maintaining concentration)
- ▶ half the students walking through the doors of a counselling centre have a diagnosable mental illness
- ▶ The mental health problems were typically stress related or interpersonal in nature.

Recommendation of Survey

Professional development opportunities for administration, faculty and support staff are recommended to help the college, as a community, to develop ownership in supporting students with mental illnesses and promoting an atmosphere conducive to mental health.

Attitude is everything

Through a careful reevaluation of one's personal biases, assumptions and current practices, faculty will be challenged to adopt a refreshed approach that connects with students more personally, meets them at their current level of learning, and inspires attainable growth in students.

University of Phoenix

Feedback can take many forms

- ▶ You are probably thinking
Written, Verbal

But how about

- ▶ Effective
- ▶ Descriptive
- ▶ Evaluative
- ▶ Motivational

Think, pair share

- ▶ Think of a situation where you have given feedback in one of those forms
- ▶ Descriptive
- ▶ Evaluative
- ▶ Motivational

- ▶ Was it Effective ?
- ▶ How did you reach that conclusion?

Focus of this workshop

- ▶ A lot of the time the feedback is verbal.
- ▶ This workshop will focus on difficult conversations that focus on academic issues. While there will be many difficult conversations that come your way that are focused on social issues such as mental health, your main responsibility is on academics and that will be the focus of this workshop.
- ▶ What is a difficult feedback conversation?
- ▶ What are the different stages to this conversation?
- ▶ What are the base causes of having to have difficult conversations?

A lot of feedback is regarding assessment but not always other reasons we might need to have a difficult conversation with a student

- ▶ 1) Behavior in the classroom
- ▶ 2) Issues within project groups
- ▶ 3) Academic Performance Concerns
- ▶ 4) Concerns regarding mental health
- ▶ 5) Student discloses personal information/crisis
- ▶ 6) Issues between students in/out of the classroom

Inform Ed

<http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/giving-student-feedback/>

However, it is in the other times that we have to dig deep to find an appropriate feedback response that will not discourage a student's learning. This is where the good teachers, the ones students remember forever in a positive light, separate themselves from the others.

Inform Ed

<http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/giving-student-feedback/>

A teacher has the distinct responsibility to nurture a student's learning and to provide feedback in such a manner that the student does not leave the classroom feeling defeated.

Here you will find 20 ideas

<http://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/giving-student-feedback/>

and techniques on how to give effective feedback that will leave your students with the feeling they can conquer the world.

EDUTOPIA

[HTTP://WWW.EDUTOPIA.ORG/BLOG/TIPS-PROVIDING-STUDENTS-MEANINGFUL-FEEDBACK-MARIANNE-STENGER](http://www.edutopia.org/blog/tips-providing-students-meaningful-feedback-marianne-stenger)

When people are trying to learn new skills, they must get some information that tells them whether or not they are doing the right thing.

Learning in the classroom is no exception.

Both the mastery of content and, more importantly, the mastery of how to think require trial-and-error learning.

EDUTOPIA

5 Golden Rules for Feedback

Although there is no quick or easy answer to this question, here are five research-based tips for providing students with the kind of feedback that will increase motivation, build on existing knowledge, and help them reflect on what they've learned.

1. Be as Specific as Possible

- ▶ For example, feedback like "Great job!" doesn't tell the learner what he did right, and likewise, a statement such as "Not quite there yet" doesn't give her any insight into what she did wrong and how she can do better the next time around.
- ▶ Instead, researchers suggest taking the time to provide learners with information on what exactly they did well, and what may still need improvement. They also note that it can be helpful to tell the learner what he is doing differently than before.
- ▶ Has a student's performance changed or improved since the last time you assessed her? Let her know about it, even if she still has a long way to go.

2. The Sooner the Better

- ▶ Numerous studies indicate that feedback is most effective when it is given immediately, rather than a few days, weeks, or months down the line.
- ▶ In one study that looked at [delayed vs. immediate feedback](#), the researchers found that participants who were given immediate feedback showed a significantly larger increase in performance than those who had received delayed feedback.

3. Address the Learner's Advancement Toward a Goal

Timperley and Hattie note that effective feedback is most often oriented around a specific achievement that students are (or should be) working toward. When giving feedback, it should be clear to students how the information they are receiving will help them progress toward their final goal.

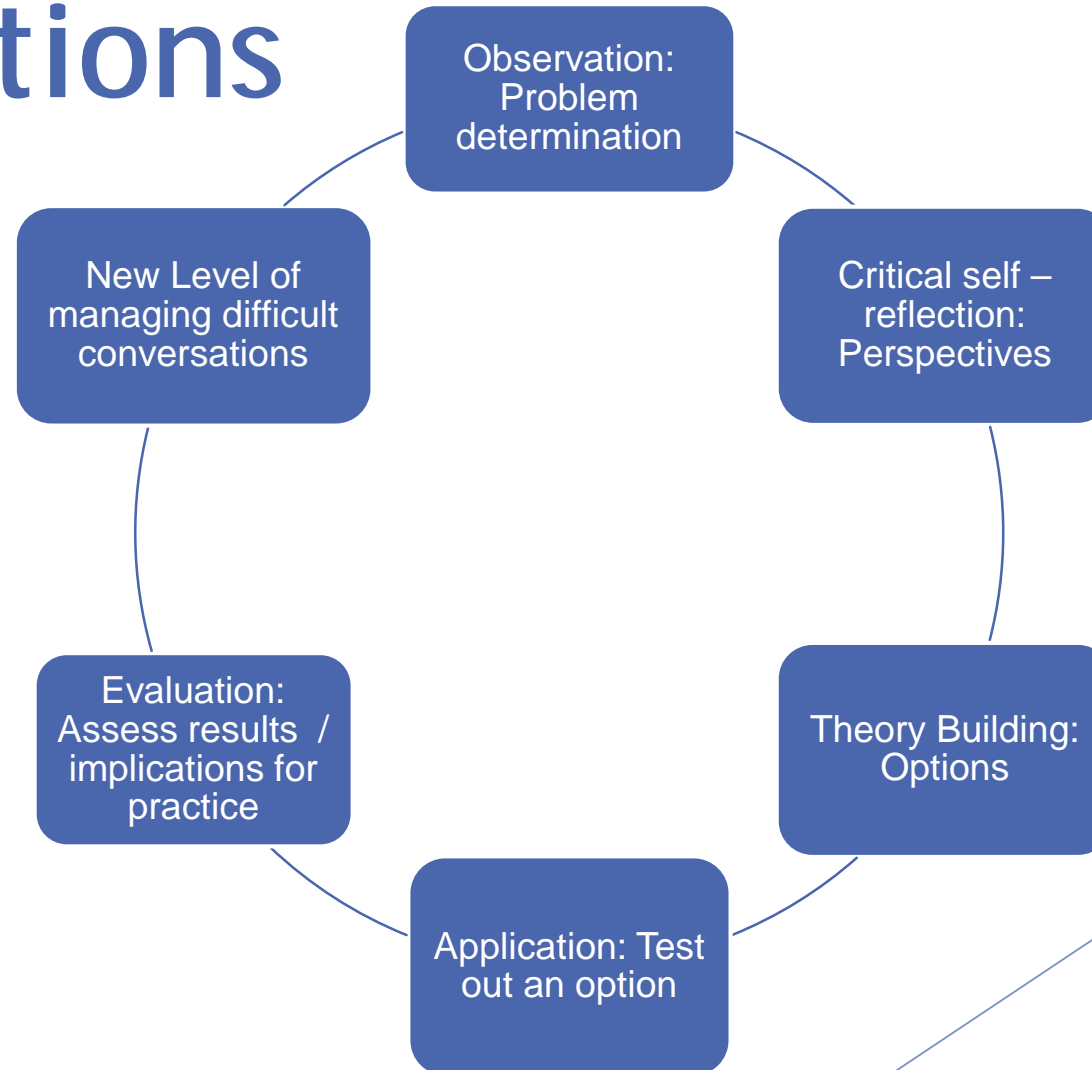
4. Present Feedback Carefully

- ▶ sometimes even the most well-meaning feedback can come across the wrong way and reduce a learner's motivation.
- ▶ Fully explain the purpose of any monitoring, and ensuring that learners understand how the feedback is meant to help them compete against their own personal bests rather than each other.

5. Involve Learners in the Process

Students **must** be given access to information about their performance At the broadest level, students need to know if they actually have mastered the material or not. Giving them information about the ways they are studying, reading, searching for information, or answering questions can be invaluable.

Stages in Managing Difficult Conversations



Before the problems arise

Think about

**What are my professional
and ethical values and
how will I communicate
those values to students?**

Before the problems arise
Think about

How do I define my
relationship with
students?

Before the problems arise

Think about

How do I engage them in the topic I am teaching?

How can I promote a love of learning?

Preparing for the conversation

Self Reflection

- ▶ What am I afraid of?
- ▶ What does my heart say?
- ▶ What am I really doing this for?
- ▶ And
- ▶ Who am I doing this for?

Conversation Starters

- I have something I'd like to discuss with you that I think will help us work together more effectively.
- I'd like to talk about _____ with you, but first I'd like to get your point of view.
- I need your help with what just happened. Do you have a few minutes to talk?
- I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)? If the person says, "Sure, let me get back to you," follow up with him.
- I think we have different perceptions about _____.
I'd like to hear your thinking on this.
- I'd like to talk about _____. I think we may have different ideas about how to _____.
- I'd like to see if we might reach a better understanding about _____.
I really want to hear your feelings about this and share my perspective as well.

Retrieved from:

<http://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>

Empathy

- ▶ Demonstrating empathy is important to having effective conversations with students about difficult topics
- ▶ What is empathy and how can I show that I have it?
- ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewvgu369Jw&app=desktop>

The difficult conversation about just about anything...

1) Manage your emotions. Be calm, clear and genuine. Start with observations not conclusions.

- ▶ *Thanks for coming in to see me today. I appreciate this opportunity to talk together. I have been concerned about _____ (observation) _____ and I wanted to be able to hear from you about your thoughts on this.*

2) Tell me your story. People need to feel like they have been heard before they are ready to hear from someone else. Listen, listen, listen.

- ▶ *Can you tell me a little about what's been going on from your perspective?*
- ▶ *I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.*
- ▶ *Can you help me understand what the issue is from your perspective.*
- ▶ *How do you think that you have been doing lately?*

The difficult conversation continued....

3) Reflect back what you have heard from them. Be empathic. Showing you have heard their perspective does not mean that you agree with their perspective.

- ▶ *So what I am hearing is that from your perspective (this is what happened).*
- ▶ *It sounds like you have been feeling _____ (name feeling) _____ in these circumstances.*

4) Share your perspective. Find common ground where you can.

- ▶ *From my perspective, this is _____ what I have seen, heard and felt _____.*
- ▶ *This is how the situation is impacting _____ you, me, others _____.*
- ▶ *I hear where you are coming from and I think we can both agree that _____.*
- ▶ *Where I think we have a point of difference is _____.*

The difficult conversation continued...

5) Identify the issue. Be clear. Avoid inflammatory statements and blame but encourage accountability and expectations.

- ▶ So, when we get down to it, the issue we are left with is _____.
- ▶ While I hear your perspective on the situation, my expectation is _____.
- ▶ I appreciate you sharing your thoughts and helping me to better understand the situation. My concern is _____.

6) Begin to problem solve. Collaborate.

- ▶ Given the issue at hand, what are your thoughts about how we can best address the situation?
- ▶ Let's think about a solution.
- ▶ I would like to share with you some options that are available.

Role Plays

- ▶ Using the example you created in your groups, now develop the beginning of your difficult conversation. Record the conversation on the paper we have provided and we will then share the responses together in the big group..

I'm doing this on the fly...Specific Conversations

- ▶ **The student who complains, demands...**
 - ▶ “It seems like this is an important issue for you and I would like to give it my full attention but I am not able to do that here. I would like to meet after class when I can listen more fully and be more thoughtful in my response”.
 - ▶ “It seems that you are very unhappy with the current situation. Tell me a little about what would need to happen to improve how you feel about this”.
- ▶ **The student who is chatting, texting, disruptive with what they are viewing on their computer...**
 - ▶ “It seems like you are quite preoccupied today. You are welcome to stay for the remainder of class if you feel you will be able to focus on what we are doing right now. If you cannot, perhaps it is better to excuse yourself for today.”

More specifics

- ▶ **The student who is clearly frustrated or upset but will not initiate talking about it...**
 - ▶ Even though you haven't said so directly, it seems pretty clear that you are upset about something. I would really like to help with that if I can but I feel at a bit of a loss without hearing from you about what is wrong. If it is something personal, that you don't feel that you can talk to me about, I can tell you that the counsellors here at the College are a great support and everything you talk about there will be confidential".
- ▶ **The student who is hostile, rude, volatile...**
 - ▶ "I respect that you have strong ideas about this but I cannot allow you to be abusive in the way you share those ideas. I have an obligation to you and to the class to ensure that we all communicate respectfully with one another. If you wish to continue to share your ideas , you will need to do so with less volume, and without swearing or insults towards others".

Resources

Hattie and Timberly. The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research* March 2007, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp. 81-112 DOI: 10.3102/003465430298487.

Ringer, Judy. (date unknown) *We Have to Talk: A Step-By-Step Checklist for Difficult Conversations*. Retrieved from <http://www.judyringer.com/resources/articles/we-have-to-talk-a-stepbystep-checklist-for-difficult-conversations.php>

Stone, D., Patton, B., Heen, S. (2010) *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*. New York, New York: Penguin.