

Tough Conversation Planner

Purpose: Use this tool to prepare for conversations that may feel uncomfortable or high-stakes. Planning helps you stay clear, fair, and focused.

1. Clarify the Goal

- What outcome do I want from this conversation?
- What would success look like (for me, for them, for the team)?

2. Gather the Facts

- What happened? (Be specific, avoid assumptions)
- What examples or evidence can I share?
- How has this impacted the work, the team, or students/customers?

3. Check Your Mindset

- What's my role in this situation?
- What assumptions or judgments am I holding?
- How can I approach this with curiosity and respect?

4. Plan Your Message

- Start with: "Here's what I've noticed..." (share facts, not labels)
- Add impact: "This matters because..."
- Invite dialogue: "What's your perspective?"

5. Anticipate Reactions

- What emotions might they have?
- How will I stay calm if they get defensive or upset?
- What phrases will help me redirect if we get off track?
- - "Let's pause and come back to the main issue."
- - "I hear you. Let's focus on solutions."

6. Close with Clarity

- Summarize agreements: "Here's what we both committed to..."
- Set next steps: "Let's check back on this in X days."
- Express support: "I want you to succeed, and I'm here to help."

Quick Reminder:

- ✓ Be direct, not harsh
- ✓ Focus on behaviors, not character
- ✓ Listen as much as you talk
- ✓ Leave the door open for growth