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CONVERSATIONAL APPROACH

Things to know and things to do for intentional conversations

Things To Know About Humans

1. **Assumptions (especially your own).** The assumptions we make about something influence all our thinking, feelings and action around an issue, conversation, or person. If we make assumptions about the people we want to have a conversation with that are incorrect, we can feel on guard or even decide not to have a conversation with them. So, it is always important to check in with yourself about the assumptions you are making about the other person.

2. **Listening and Empathy.** Genuinely listening to others opens the door for them to be willing to listen to you. Empathy is the ability to sincerely work to understand where another person is coming from and how they see the issue or situation. It does not mean you have to agree with it. When people feel listened to and understood, they are far more open to listening to the things you have to say and the way you see it.

3. **Emotional Congruence.** Emotional congruence is the ability to reflect back to your listener the thoughts and feelings they are sharing with you and do so in a way where your voice tone and body language match what you are saying. It also relates to noticing when others are speaking if their body language and/or voice tone match what they are saying.

4. **Conflicted Feelings are Normal.** We can often feel that if someone has conflicted feelings about an issue we care deeply about, it is our job to change their feelings. It isn't. What is important is to be able to accept the feelings they are sharing. By acknowledging their emotional conflict or confusion, it helps the person feel understood and in turn opens the door to them wanting to listen and understand you and your views as well.

5. **Respecting People's Values.** Accepting people's values conveys respect for them and their viewpoint. Acknowledging their values implies sincerity and respect by not pushing the person to adopt values they do not hold in order to move them in your direction. It also allows you to more effectively be an example of how you hold values they may share.

Things To Do in Conversation

Before Starting

Review these guidelines before starting. They will help you prepare, build your confidence, and remind you of what you want to say, how you might say it, and the goal of initiating genuine dialogue.

1. **Start with easy.** For your first conversation, start with a friend or family member that you believe is most open to listening. It's important to start with what is easier first so you can build your skills and confidence.

2. **Think about what you want to say and what you want to stay away from saying.** If you know there are certain things that will be more useful to bring up, do so. Remember you conversational triggers and that they are an invitation to get hooked emotionally and you don't need to accept that invitation.

3. **Check in with yourself and pay attention to your self-talk.** Make it positive or neutral ("I can do this" instead of "I'll never be able to handle this") and that you are mentally planning for a learning experience. We know that how we talk to ourselves can make a huge difference in our feelings of confidence as well as our approach to the experience.

4. **Find a one-on-one opportunity** when they or you aren't distracted by your phones, meal preparation, kids, or something else.

5. **Make your goal that the conversation goes well,** not that you have to win them over immediately. That would be great if it happened, but if you can simply begin a dialogue that they will stay genuinely stay open to across time, that would be terrific.

6. **Set your intention to genuinely listen and be open to their views and any concerns.** Remember: being empathic does not mean that you agree, it means that you are sincerely trying to understand.

7. **Think about how you want to start.** It is usually helpful to start with something casual and connected with you. It can be just sharing that you were at this training, or you saw a media story about the issue. Just be yourself.

During the Conversation

8. **Start slowly and be real, talk about why this matters to you.** Look for areas of agreement that you can build on. Keep your conversation personal and give examples from your life or people that you know personally. Sincere self-disclosure can be very impactful to folks that have conflicted feelings.

9. **Listen and pay attention to the underlying values that the person is sharing**. Ask questions and reflect back what you're hearing to be sure you are understanding correctly. "It sounds like you care deeply about….What I'm hearing you say is….Is that right?"

10. **Stay away from debate.** When debating, people typically are not open to their more empathic feelings. Debating is about winning an argument, not about listening and sincerely trying to understand. It is far more helpful to talk about what makes this important to you.

11. **Use connecting language** like, "how do you see it," or "this can be difficult sometimes". Stay away from disconnecting language like, "I hear what you are saying, BUT…."

12. **Pause and check in with yourself** and if you are starting to get revved up, take some slow and deep breaths. If you are too worked up or they are too worked up, it is time to shift the conversation. If you are trying too hard to convince them you are no longer having a conversation and then it's also time to shift the discussion.

13. **Thank them for the conversation.** Once again, the goal is to start a dialogue that has the longer term goal of changing hearts and minds. People keep thinking, even when we aren't with them, and we want them thinking positively about the conversation.

14. **If they are supportive, ask if they'd be willing to get involved.** Know the next steps for helping them become involved.