

Preparing for Difficult Dialogue

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Most difficult interactions aren't ones you anticipate, but once in a while you know a dialogue will be difficult and have time to prepare. In those cases, you can use these six contemplation points:

1. Anchoring and staying grounded
2. Boundaries
3. Thoughts and beliefs
4. Stuckness or attachment
5. Feelings and needs
6. Requests

Ask and answer the following questions for each contemplation point:

Anchoring and Staying Grounded

1. Are there any tender needs or particular types of reactivity that might get triggered for me?
2. What anchor will I engage to manage reactivity and stay grounded?
3. Are there any regulation strategies I want to use? For example, having this dialogue while walking in nature.

Boundaries

1. What topic or situation am I willing to talk about?
2. How much time am I willing to give for this dialogue?
3. How will I set a boundary if the other person veers into things that I don't wish to discuss or if the dialogue is approaching my time limit?
4. What are my non-negotiables in this situation?

Thoughts and Beliefs

1. What am I thinking or believing about the situation or the other person that may be reactive or simply not true?
2. What else could I think or believe?

Stuckness or Attachment

1. How can I release an impulse to prove that my view, memory of the situation, or opinion is the right one?*

2. Where am I attached to a certain agenda or strategy?
3. How can I release my grip on particular agendas or strategies?*
4. Do I have hidden agendas? For example, "In my heart, I want my father to say he is proud of me and that he is sorry for not seeing me all these years."

Feelings and needs

1. What feelings and needs are alive for me? Relative to the situation? Relative to my anticipation of the other person's response? Relative to the outcome I am wanting?
2. What is my guess about the feelings and needs alive for the other person?
3. What is my guess about the other person's ability to meet the needs I hope to have met by them?

Requests

1. What requests do I have?
2. What needs are connected to each request?
3. What requests do I guess the other person will have? What needs do I guess are connected to their possible requests?

As you look through these contemplation points, preparing for dialogue might seem like a very big job. This is true. Effective and connected dialogue requires significant self-awareness, mindfulness, and skill. It may also be true that you are particularly aware and mindful of many of the points above. In that case, what may be most salient for you is to focus on the points that most often escape your awareness.

Practice

Take a moment now to review the contemplation points above. What do you already do consistently? What is one thing you would like to remember for the next difficult dialogue?