

Difficult Conversations Overview



Sometimes feedback requires a different model for the learner, trainee, peer, or colleague. This type of feedback occurs when the feedback addresses performance or behavior issues that directly challenges the standards and expectations of the work environment and/or educational program. These conversations may be difficult for all parties involved. The following structured approaches are recommended depending on the situation and individuals involved.



SOAP Model for Creating Learning Conversations from Difficult Conversations

Usage: For working with learners or trainees where there have been performance issues (e.g., disruptive behavior in group settings)

Goal: To create learning conversations that invite participation and understanding from both parties to come to a resolution.

Structure:

- Subjective: Your reaction to behavior or situation
- Objective: What you saw or experienced
- Assessment: Determine the root of the situation/behavior
- Plan: Collaborate and co-create ways for the learner to improve their performance.



Cunningham's Three Models for Difficult Conversations

Usage: For working with colleagues and teams where disruptions are negatively affecting team dynamics and performance.

Goal: To remedy performance issues and move forward with a healthy team and interpersonal dynamics. Models vary on the number of offenses or issues identified.

Models:

- Stub Your Toe: The first time someone did something inconsistent with policies, standards, values, etc.
- Impact Message: Persistent behavior is disruptive to team performance.
- Low Performer: Persistent behavior that continues to negatively impact team performance and/or quality, safety, etc.

For more details about each model, please refer to the CFE Feedback and Difficult Conversations One-Pagers Series.

- References:**
1. Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (2000). *Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most*. New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books.
 2. Schnapp BH, Alvarez A, Ham J, Paetow G, Santen SA, Hart D. An interactive session to help faculty manage difficult learner behaviors in the didactic setting. *MedEdPORTAL*. 018;14:10774.
 3. Cunningham, L. 2015. *Taking conversations from difficult to doable*. Pensacola, FL: Studer Group.

