

Threatening situations: Planning difficult conversations

Are you planning to have a difficult conversation? This can e.g. be suitability assessments, explaining a failing grade, or giving feedback on undesirable behaviour. Depending on the type of conversation, always check your organization's routines and rules.

Before the conversation

- **Timing:** Choose a time when others are present in the area around. For the person's sake, don't schedule or have the conversation before a weekend or holiday. Ideally, there should be a short time between the invitation and the meeting.
- **Room:** Check if your organization has rooms suited for such conversations. Avoid using your own office and preferably use a room where everyone can leave the situation if needed.
- **Create a safe environment:** Think about how you will convey the message.
- **Visualize the conversation:** What scenarios might arise? What could be difficult in this conversation? Discuss/rehearse with a colleague.
- **Bring a colleague if necessary:** Do you feel it's safe to have the conversation alone, or should you bring a colleague? Inform the other party that they can also bring someone.
- **Inform others:** Inform your colleagues around you about the conversation. If you are worried it might escalate, e.g., due to the person's history, ask a security guard or colleague to be nearby.
- **Arrive early:** Have time to assess the meeting room. Consider how you will sit in relation to the door.
- **Meeting the person outside the room can be smart:** This allows you to gauge their state of mind as you walk in together.

During the conversation

- Maintain an **open** and **friendly** attitude.
- **Explain the purpose of the conversation:** Why you are there, wishes for the conversation.
- Let the person share their **perception** of the situation. Ask **open-ended** questions: How do you think... How do you want...
- Be clear about **your expectations** and any **demands**. Note: It is wise to say, "People in this position/studying this must..." rather than "You must..."
- **Check regularly** that you both agree on what you are discussing.
- **Summarize:** What have we agreed on, and who will follow up on what?

If the situation becomes threatening

- See: What to do in a threatening situation.
- Take all threats seriously and never put yourself in danger.

Not an emergency? If the person exhibits concerning behaviour, consider contacting the emergency medical service (116 117) or the police (02800) for advice and assistance. If you do not want to show that you are calling, e.g. say that you are going to get a cup of coffee. Alternatively, ask a colleague to make the call.

After the conversation

- Write a summary of what you agreed/disagreed on. Follow the rules for case handling and documentation for the type of case you are dealing with.
- If the conversation was difficult, talk with your manager or a colleague. Remember to maintain confidentiality as required by your employment.
- Follow up on any agreements made during the conversation.
- Report any incidents and near-incidents in the organization's deviation system.