

MANAGING A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION WITH A TRAINEE/MENTOR

On occasion, during a placement, a trainee may have said something or acted in a way that a mentor or staff member believe is causing an issue or upset. It is vital that a professional dialogue occurs as quickly as possible to resolve the issue, rather than waiting for the university tutor to visit or letting it affect professional working relationships. We know that maintaining good working relationships is crucial for the pupils, mentor and trainee and therefore approaching a difficult conversation may be challenging. This framework is designed to support both mentors and trainees in considering what the issue is, why it needs to be dealt with and preparing a non-confrontational introduction to invite discussion about the issue.

Preparation (*things to consider prior to asking the individual for a conversation*)

1) What is happening?

What are my reasons for having this conversation?

What has contributed to the situation?

What do I hope this conversation will achieve? (*consider if it is just to 'get a gripe off your chest' or has a purpose/resolution as the focus*)

What assumption am I making about the other person's intentions?

What might the other person be thinking about the situation? (*e.g. your pre-conceptions of their view/intentions*)

What are my concerns about having this conversation? (*risks, potential outcomes*)

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS – A FRAMEWORK FOR RESOLUTION

Below is a suggested agenda or framework for the planning the conversation starter.

1. The 30 second introduction *(please see next page for further suggestions and examples)*

Opening the conversation.

Describe what is happening - provide specific examples of the behaviours and **facts** about the situation that you want to discuss. **Ensure that you are not using evaluative or judgmental statements – do not make assumptions, stick to factual information only.

Describe the effect it is having – describe clearly the effect this is having and on whom, without assigning blame, consider the person and those around them.

Identify what has contributed to the problem – again, stick to facts, not assumptions of the other persons' motivation or intentions.

2. Invite discussion

Try to find out as much as possible about the other person's point of view – ask questions and listen.

Can you say a little more about how you see things?

How is this affecting you?

What is your view of this?

What do you want to happen?

Tell me how you see the situation

What is your perspective on this?

How do you feel about what I have just said?

How can we prevent this from happening again?

What are the barriers to us achieving this?

How do you feel we can move forward from here?

What options do you think are open to us in this situation?

3. Discuss alternatives

Look to make this collaborative, so the issue is resolved and relationships are maintained

4. Agree way forward

Make sure both parties know what their role in this is

5. Close

It is important to do this clearly otherwise so that the placement runs smoothly for both you and the trainee.....

'Thank you for agreeing to discuss xxx - don't hesitate to speak to me if you need to discuss further.

'Thanks for listening xxx - don't hesitate to speak to me if you want to discuss this any further.

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS – WRITING THE 30 SECOND OPENER

Before beginning a difficult conversation, it is worth spending time preparing the 30 second introduction. This allows the tone and focus of the conversation to be clear, neutral and to the point.

An opening statement

'I would like to talk to you about....'

'I would like to see if we can reach a better understanding about how we are going to manage

'I think we might have different perceptions about....'

Try to avoid indirect openers such as 'I was wondering how you felt the meeting went today...' or 'Is everything okay?'

A description of what is happening

Provide specific examples of the behaviour or the situation that you want to discuss, ensure that you are not using evaluative or judgemental statements – stick to facts, avoid making assumptions of the other person/their behaviours.

A description of the effect of that behaviour

Clearly describe the effect or the above. e.g. on pupils, on you/other staff, on their progress, on their wellbeing

Clarification of impact/what is at stake

'I am concerned about this as I think it affecting your working relationship with and so would like to find a resolution for you both.'

'I am concerned that you might become increasingly under pressure to meet the placement requirements if...

'I do not want you to miss out on opportunities to....'

Acknowledge of your contribution to the problem (if appropriate)

'I recognise that we probably should have had this conversation a while ago'

'I appreciate that my reaction was short and lacked clarity'

'I know I am not always easy to get hold of.'

Asking question to invite them to join the conversation

Decide which question you are going to end with open the two-way conversation in a positive way.

OPENING STATEMENT – EXAMPLES

Scenario 1 - you (mentor) have noticed that your trainee is not arriving in enough time in the morning to properly prepare for his/her lessons.

'I'd like to talk to you about this morning's lesson. I noticed that you didn't have enough time to get your resources ready and this has happened on a number of occasions. As the resources weren't ready the children were unsure of what to do and this then affected the pace of the lesson and ultimately the children's behaviour. This then also resulted in some of the children not making as much progress as they should have. I'm concerned that this will impact on their learning over time and be a barrier to you achieving progress in this strand. What is your view on this and is there anything we can do together to help address this?'

Scenario 2 – you have noticed that the relationship between you (mentor) and the trainee is very strained

'I would like to hear your perspective about the way we work professionally together and share my perspective as well. I have found that we are disagreeing quite a lot e.g. response to my feedback after lessons and approaches to your teaching. This is causing me some stress and anxiety and feels like a barrier between us. I am aware that we both have to continue to work together effectively for the remainder of the practice to ensure the children and you continue to make progress. I am keen to do so, so it is a positive and successful experience for the pupils, you and me. What are your thoughts about this?'

