

Life is full of difficult conversations which often result in arguments. Life is easier when we develop the skills to manage difficult conversations without hostility.

Ten ways of avoiding hostility are:

Consider and reflect on what you want to say. Keep it simple. Be clear about exactly what the problem is - have an example in mind - think about how it affects you. Think about the outcome you would like and how that might impact the other person. Is it reasonable and proportionate?

Avoid words that sound accusatory or blaming. The other person may have little or no idea that what they are doing has any impact on you or the extent of how you feel. Prepare yourself to listen to the other person. Imagine how you would like to be heard. Practice hearing something you find inflammatory and responding calmly.

Ask someone you trust to let you 'vent' or 'offload' before you meet the other person. Be particular in asking them not to give an opinion but to simply listen and empathise. And ask the same friend or a different friend to be there afterwards so you can talk about how it went.

Consider how long you have waited to deal with the problem. Your frustration may be partly because you didn't say something sooner. Consider how the other person might react to your levels of frustration.

Face to face is probably the best approach so you can work towards a solution. Remember that they might not be expecting this so their initial reaction may be embarrassment or shock. If you notice the person is taken aback, it might be better just to agree another time to talk about it.

If you prefer to write a letter or send an email or text, remember the meaning or tone of words can easily be misunderstood. On the other hand, a polite note may give them time to reflect on a response especially if you explain that this is your reason for writing.

Choose your time. Choose a time when you will both have time to talk. When you are both rushing out may not be the best time, nor late at night or when you are feeling most angry about the issue.

Remember that a problem takes time to build up. It is rarely possible to really solve a problem in one conversation. Even if you think it is unfair, problems take time and goodwill on all sides to resolve.

If the other person is not positive or not responsive, you may be better to ask if you can both think about the problem and have another meeting. Many people do not respond well when they feel under pressure. Giving them time to 'sleep on it' may produce a better response.

Stay calm. Even if you do not like or agree with the way the other person responds to you, try to stay calm. Getting angry will not help. Clearly state that your intention is to find a solution that works for everyone involved

Phrases that might help

“Would you be willing to....”

“Is this a good time to talk?”

“I would like to discuss a sensitive issue”

“Can you help me with this problem?”

Phrases to avoid

“Stop doing this”

“You should....”

“You have to....”

“You are selfish”

If you cannot imagine remaining calm or listening to the other person, if just thinking about the problem or the person sets you off or if you can only imagine the other person as bad or wrong, you probably need a mediator.

Peaceful Solutions

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