

A Simple Guide for Hard Conversations

Sharing Framework

1. Observations

A description of what is seen or heard without adding interpretations.

For example, instead of saying:
"You're avoiding this."

you could say:
"I've noticed you've been quiet when college comes up, and you've been changing the subject when I ask."

2. Feelings

Feelings are emotions, not stories or judgments about what others are doing.

For example, instead of saying:
"I feel like you don't care."
(which includes an interpretation of another's behavior)

you could say:
"I feel anxious about not understanding your decision process."

3. Needs

Feelings arise from needs, which are universal, ongoing, and not dependent on specific people or actions.

State your need rather than focusing on another person's behavior.

For example:

"I need reassurance to feel good about this."

4. Requests

Requests are concrete and clearly stated, they ask for what we want instead of what we don't want.

For example:
"Would you be open to setting aside time this weekend to talk through your options together?"

If your request is met with a "no", treat it as an opportunity for further dialogue.

A Simple Guide for Hard Conversations

Listening & Responding

Mirroring is a great first step. It involves reflecting back what you hear without fixing or judging in order to clarify and confirm your understanding.

Focus on:

- Reflecting the facts you hear (what happened)
- Naming the feeling underneath (even if you're guessing)
- Staying curious instead of reactive

Before offering advice, ask:

"Do you want solutions or just someone to listen?"

Not Sure What To Say? Try One of These

- "Can you help me understand that a little more?"
- "What part of this feels hardest right now?"
- "It sounds like you're feeling ___ — is that right?"
- "What feels important to you about this?"
- "A lot of people feel this way during big changes."
- "How can I support you right now?"
- "I'm feeling like this conversation might be taking the wrong tone, can we take a few minutes of space?"
- "We don't have to solve this today, when should I check back-in?"

Common Mistakes

- Jumping to advice too quickly
- Minimizing feelings
- Correcting facts or explaining intent
- Making it about your own experience
- Solving problems for them when they didn't ask for help

Why This Matters

- Reduces defensiveness
- Builds trust over time
- Keeps conversations connective, even when they're hard

A Simple Guide for Hard Conversations

Sharing Framework

1. Observations

A description of what is seen or heard without adding interpretations.

For example, instead of saying:
"You're being pushy about school."

you could say:
"I've noticed that whenever we talk about schools, the conversation gets tense."

2. Feelings

Feelings describe what's happening inside you, not what someone else is doing.

For example, instead of saying:
"I feel like you're pressuring me."
(which includes an interpretation of another's behavior)

you could say:
"I feel uncertain and am worried about choosing wrong."

3. Needs

Feelings arise from needs, which are universal, ongoing, and not dependent on specific people or actions.

State your need rather than focusing on another person's behavior.

For example:

"I need time to explore my options."

4. Requests

Requests are concrete and clearly stated, they ask for what we want instead of what we don't want.

For example:

"Would you be willing to give me a few days to think before we talk about this again?"

If your request is met with a "no", treat it as an opportunity for further dialogue.

A Simple Guide for Hard Conversations

Listening & Responding

Mirroring is a great first step in responding. It involves reflecting back what you hear without fixing or judging in order to clarify and confirm your understanding.

Focus on:

- Reflecting the facts you heard (what happened)
- Naming what the other person might be feeling (even if you're guessing)
- Staying curious instead of reactive

Before offering advice, ask:

"Do you want solutions or just someone to listen?"

Not Sure What To Say? Try One of These

- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "Can you help me understand that better?"
- "What part of this feels hardest right now?"
- "It sounds like you're feeling ___ — is that right?"
- "What feels important to you about this?"
- "Do you want space, or do you want to keep talking?"
- "We don't have to solve this today, when should I check back-in?"

Common Mistakes

- Interrupting to explain yourself
- Minimizing ("It's not a big deal")
- Turning it into an argument
- Shutting down or avoiding the conversation

Why This Matters

- Helps you be heard without things turning into a fight
- Makes hard conversations feel less overwhelming
- Builds trust
- Keeps conversations open