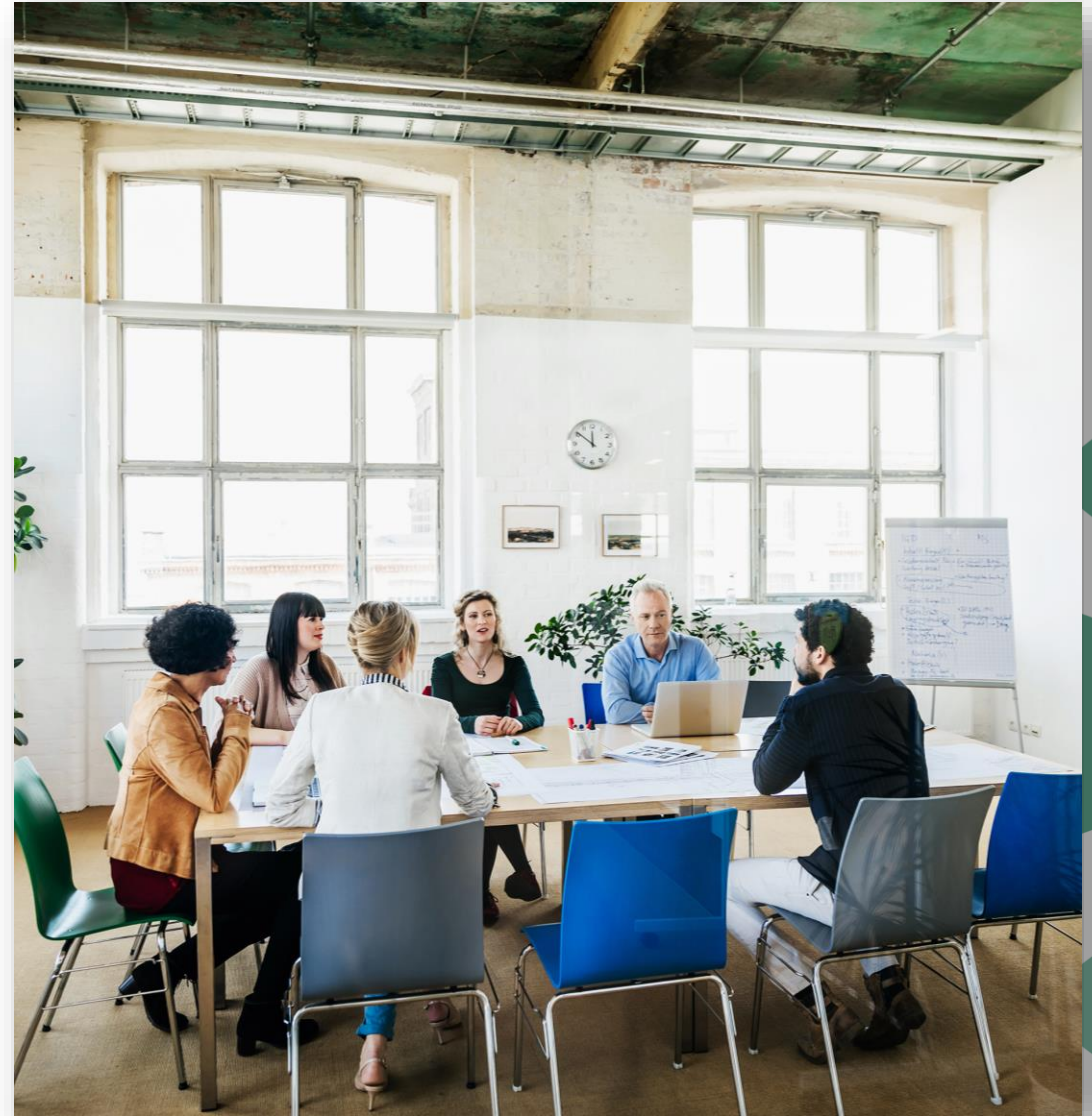




Northern Light
HealthSM

STRENGTHEN ME

Difficult and Uncomfortable Conversations



Northern LightSM Healthy Life EAP

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MAINE COUNSELING ASSOCIATION

A State Branch of the American Counseling Association



Objectives

- Define what makes a conversation difficult and how to know when one is needed
- Discuss why certain conversations are uncomfortable
- Identify strategies to effectively engage in difficult conversations

Defining “Difficult Conversations”

Difficult conversations are conversations where:

- **Emotions are high**
- **We feel vulnerable**
- **We don't feel heard**



Difficult Conversations at Work

Examples:

- **Voicing a concern to a colleague**
- **Delivering critical feedback**
- **Discussing a sensitive topic**



Why we avoid difficult conversations

- **Desire to be well-liked**
- **Difficulty managing our own (and other's) emotions**
- **Assume we know how the other person will respond and expect a negative outcome**



When in conflict, we may...

- Avoid or ignore someone
- Lose our temper
- Shut down or disappear
- Downplay our feelings
- Overstate our feelings
- Say things we don't mean
- Act impulsively



Strategies: Before the Conversation

Identify your goals for the conversation:

- **What needs to be communicated?**
- **What do you hope for from the other person?**
- **What change do you hope to see as a result of the conversation?**



Strategies: Before the Conversation

- Find the right setting and timing
- Make sure the other person is available and can give you their full attention
- Secure a witness if necessary
- Know how you'll begin



Strategies: During the Conversation

- **Lead with curiosity**
- **Actively listen**
- **Be open and direct**
- **Try a face-to face conversation**



Listening

- Listening to listen- not only to respond
- Stay curious about the other person's perspective
- When someone's perspective is different from yours, try to consider the context



Listening (cont.)

- Verbal encouragement
 - “Mm-hmm,” “ok,” “yeah,” nodding
- Open-ended questions
 - How, when, what
- Reflecting back what you hear
 - “So it sounds like...”
 - “Do I have this right?...”



Strategies: During the Conversation

- **Acknowledge common ground**
- **Be willing to walk away**
- **Consider:**
 - **Overall objective**
 - **Self-respect goal**
 - **Relationship goal**



Ways We Get Stuck

- Using absolutes like “always” and “never”
- Minimizing our own responsibility and overemphasizing another’s
- Rigidity and inability to make changes
- Globalizing the problem



The “And” Stance

- Using “and” rather than “but” in order to acknowledge complexity of the situation as well as other possible perspectives
- **Examples:**
 - “Our collaborative project has been a lot of extra work for you, AND I need more support in order to complete it by the deadline.”
 - “You need a place to emotionally vent how hard this work is, AND your venting has been making it difficult for me to focus.”



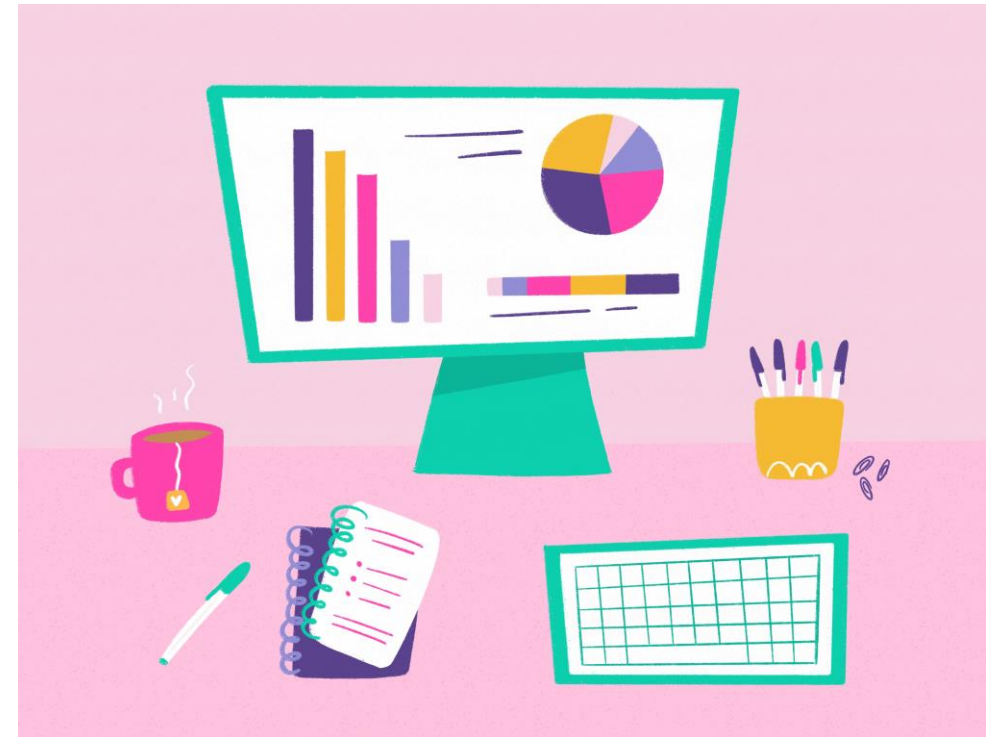
Slow Down

1. Wait before responding to what upset you.
2. Count to 10 before speaking
3. Read any written communication out loud to check for tone
4. Show a draft or practice out loud with someone else
5. No crude language, insults, or name calling, ever
6. Try first to work it out yourselves, and involve supervisor or HR if you can't



After the Conversation

- **Keep the conversation confidential.**
 - **Only share information with a manager or supervisor who needs to know.**
- **Monitor the situation.**
 - **Is the desired change happening?**
 - **If not, what is your next step?**
 - **Refer back to the conversation as needed**



The Culture of Working Relationships

- Mutual respect
- Mutual trust
- Responsibility and considerateness
- Clear communication
- Exchange of ideas and perspectives
- Requesting and giving constructive feedback



Ask for Help

Reach out to professional resources such as clergy, medical, and behavioral health professionals.

Strengthen ME/ Healthy Life EAP is here for your individual, confidential support.

For more information, call 1.800.769.9819 or send an email to StrengthenME@northernlight.org

Contact Us

StrengthenME and Healthy Life EAP are here for you with trainings, support groups, stress management groups, and individual support.



Scan QR code to complete our training survey.



1-800-769-9819



StrengthenME@northernlight.org



[www.healthylifeeap.com/
Solutions/Strengthen-ME](http://www.healthylifeeap.com/Solutions/Strengthen-ME)

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