

## FINDING THE WORDS: LEADERS

### 5 Principles of Having Difficult Conversations

Before the conversation begins, it's good to prepare. Conversations are best had when both parties:

- Feel rested
- Do not feel rushed for time
- Do not have urgent issues that require attention
- Agreed to have the conversation
- Are in a frame of mind to think and talk clearly

Thinking about what you will say and do before, during, and after the conversation allows you to be most helpful to the person you lead. Below is language discussed in the course you can modify to fit your style when someone you lead is having a difficult time:



#### 1. Prepare

Talk with someone you lead about finding a time to have a conversation about their wellbeing.

Words to Consider	Words to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I've noticed you haven't seemed like yourself lately. Can we schedule a time to talk in my office when we won't be interrupted?"</li> <li>• "I would like to find some time to sit down and check in with you, free of distractions. What would be a good time for you?"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I need to talk to you right now. I don't care what you are doing."</li> <li>• "You need to talk to me about what's going on. I can't help you unless you open up."</li> </ul>



#### 2. Show You Care

Remind the person you lead how much you care and tell them in a neutral way what is causing you concern. Support can look many different ways. Let them know that talking to you is safe.

Words to Consider	Words to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "You look more tired lately and you seem to be on edge. Do you notice these things as well?"</li> <li>• "I hear your concerns and want to support you. I also think it's important that we involve (insert individual or office) because they are trained to specifically help with these kinds of concerns. We can go talk with them together."</li> <li>• "I still have your back."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "You're messing up the mission."</li> <li>• "You're bringing everyone down."</li> <li>• "Just stay positive"</li> <li>• "Everything happens for a reason"</li> <li>• "How can you say something like that?"</li> <li>• "It could be worse."</li> </ul>



### 3. Connect to Help

It's important to reinforce that the person you lead is still cared for, respected, and not a burden to others.

Words to Consider	Words to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "I understand you are having a difficult time, and I am ready to listen."</li><li>• "That sounds really difficult."</li><li>• "I'm glad we talked. I think there might be other people who can help as well. Sometimes it can also help to talk with a person who can directly address the difficulties you shared."</li><li>• "What else can I do that would be helpful to you? I know that I may not be able to change the situation, but I will help you to the best of my ability."</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Just try thinking positive and you'll feel better."</li><li>• "Are you sure this isn't just an excuse for missing deadlines? It feels like you're not trying hard enough."</li><li>• "Everyone deals with stress. I've been through worse, and I got through it just fine."</li></ul>



### 4. Ask About Safety

Many people won't share thoughts of hurting or killing themselves unless we ask about them directly.

Words to Consider	Words to Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"</li><li>• "Thank you for trusting me enough to share what you did. I can imagine it might have felt difficult to say."</li><li>• "I'm sure you know about the risks with firearms. How do you store them to keep yourself and those in your home safe?"</li><li>• "Let's get help. We can do it together."</li><li>• "Do you have a firearm at home?"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• "You aren't thinking about killing yourself, right?"</li><li>• "You shouldn't have a gun at home if you're feeling like this."</li><li>• "That's selfish—you're not thinking about how it will affect others."</li><li>• "You don't really mean that."</li></ul>



### 5. Care for Yourself

Caring for yourself is just as critical as caring for someone else. Below are some ways you can practice self-care.

- Exercise - even a short walk
- Eat a meal you love
- Call or text a friend or loved one
- Listen to music or a podcast
- Play with your pet
- Read a book or write in a journal
- Take a shower
- Get outside in nature
- Mantram Repetition Course, Powered by PsychArmor  
<https://learn.psycharmor.org/courses/mantram>