

Difficult Conversation Cheat Sheet

Use this quick guide to approach difficult conversations with clarity, confidence, and respect. Whether you're giving feedback, addressing conflict, or setting boundaries, structure matters.

1. Prepare Your Mindset

- Stay calm and focused. Assume good intent.
- Know your desired outcome: clarity, resolution, or understanding?
- Rehearse the conversation if needed, but don't script it word-for-word.

2. Use the S.T.A.T.E. Framework

- S - Share your facts: Describe what you've observed without judgment.
- T - Tell your story: Explain how it makes you feel or what concerns you.
- A - Ask for their viewpoint: Invite their perspective openly.
- T - Talk tentatively: Use language that is honest but not aggressive.
- E - Encourage dialogue: Keep the conversation two-way, not a lecture.

3. Use These Starter Phrases

- 'I noticed that...'
- 'Can we talk about something that's been on my mind?'
- 'Here's how I'm seeing the situation...'
- 'Help me understand your side of this.'
- 'What do you think would help us move forward?'

4. Keep It Productive

- Focus on behavior, not personality.
- Avoid blame-use 'I' statements, not 'you always...'
- Don't let emotion take over. Breathe and stay present.
- End with a next step or agreement if possible.

5. Follow Up

- Revisit the conversation if needed.
- Acknowledge progress.
- Keep trust and accountability front and center.

