

Sort Out the Three Conversations

	A Battle of Messages	A Learning Conversation
<p>The "What Happened?" Conversation</p> <p>Challenge: The situation is more complex than either person can see.</p>	<p>Assumption: I know all I need to know to understand what happened.</p> <p>Goal: Persuade them I'm right.</p>	<p>Assumption: Each of us is bringing different information and perceptions to the table; there are likely to be important things that each of us doesn't know.</p> <p>Goal: Explore each other's stories: how we understand the situation and why.</p>
	<p>Assumption: I know what they intended.</p> <p>Goal: Let them know what they did wrong.</p>	<p>Assumption: I know what I intended, and the impact their actions had on me. I don't know and can't know what's in their head.</p> <p>Goal: Share the impact on me, and find out what they were thinking. Also find out what impact I'm having on them.</p>
	<p>Assumption: It's all their fault. (Or it's all my fault.)</p> <p>Goal: Get them to admit blame and take responsibility for making amends.</p>	<p>Assumption: We probably <i>both</i> contributed to this mess.</p> <p>Goal: Understand the contribution system: how our actions interact to produce this result.</p>

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<p>The Feelings Conversation</p> <p>Challenge: The situation is emotionally charged.</p>	<p>Assumption: Feelings are irrelevant and wouldn't be helpful to share. (Or, my feelings are their fault and they need to hear about them.)</p>	<p>Assumption: Feelings are the heart of the situation. Feelings are usually complex. I may have to dig a bit to understand</p>
	<p>Goal: Avoid talking about feelings. (Or let'em have it!)</p>	<p>Goal: Address feelings (mine and theirs) without judgments or attributions. Acknowledge feelings before problem-solving.</p>

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<i>The Identity Conversation</i>	Assumption: I'm competent or incompetent, good or bad, lovable or unlovable. There is no in-between.	Assumption: There may be a lot at stake psychologically for both of us. Each of us is complex, neither of us is perfect.
Challenge: The situation threatens our identity.	Goal: Protect my all-or-nothing self-image.	Goal: Understand the identity issues on the line for each of us. Build a more complex self-image to maintain my balance better.

From *"Difficult Conversations: How to discuss what matters most"*

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