



Respectful Disagreement Conversation Tools

Pause a moment and calm down. Your emotions, whether you are aware of it or not, will be mirrored in the other person so take a moment to breathe before proceeding. That short centering pause could mean the difference in the other person listening or shutting down.

Move to eye level. This puts the conversation on an equal playing field.

Be direct. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Expressing how you feel is an important start.

“Start with the heart.” (Patterson et al., 2002) Voice your genuine concerns in the situation. Own your role in the situation since you are the only one you can control.

Articulate “mutual purpose.” (Patterson et al., 2002) You may each be focused on differing goals and reasons for your perspective. But finding and articulating your mutual purpose will help you find a common ground from which you can seek solutions together. Those skilled in facilitating dialogue do not see “either/ors” but find an “and” in any situation.

Show “mutual respect.” (Patterson et al., 2002) Judging, criticizing or blaming will put the other person on the defensive and may end your constructive conversation. If you see the other is not listening or backing away, they are likely not feeling respected. Address it directly. “I trust your good judgment. I just want to share an alternative perspective.”

Offer the “contrasting” view. (Patterson et al., 2002) Sometimes you need to say what is not true or not your purpose in order to allay any fears on the part of the other. Often in challenging, emotionally charged situations, our minds create a more inflated story than is the actual reality. Saying what the situation is not will help eliminate those worries.

Return to “safety.” (Patterson et al., 2002) If at any point during your important conversation, you see you are losing your audience, focus solely on safety. They may be feeling a lack of respect. They are feeling misunderstood or blamed and are pulling out of the “pool of shared meaning.” Quickly create safety by articulating their competence, autonomy and belonging – their ability and track record of making good choices.

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R., & Switzler, A. (2002). *Crucial conversations; Tools for talking when stakes are high*. NY: McGraw-Hill.