

7 Proven Steps to Handling a Difficult Conversation

with Staff and Clients



Why we can help

Challenging encounters tap into our deep fears - the stakes can become very high very quickly.

At the Groupwork Institute, we use the phrase 'Challenging Encounters' deliberately. Our approach encompasses environmental factors, your own contribution to the encounter and a belief that you are not dealing with difficult people – rather that at the time, they are simply people exhibiting challenging or aggravated behaviour.

Our focus is on practical confidence, so you can make a constructive contribution to dealing with any challenging encounter. Self aware, emotionally resilient people will routinely handle challenging encounters and aggressive behaviour more effectively. In fact - they will be able to prevent many from occurring!

This e-book will support you to change your own behaviour and be able to influence others. This approach can be used in a variety of settings; it's about life skills as well as work skills.

Substantial behaviour change is required for you to be able to rely on responding wisely. Now, this is a considerable task! Behaviour change is possible, but not easy!

Warm regards

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Purpose of this e-book

To enhance your skills and confidence in handling any challenging encounter compassionately and wisely.

Why do you need to know?

Self aware, emotionally resilient people routinely handle challenging encounters and aggressive behaviour more effectively.

In fact, they're able to prevent many from occurring!

What we don't do

We don't 'deal with difficult people'.

We often hear the expression 'dealing with difficult people'. We believe this approach tends to put all the responsibility on the other person. It discounts your own contribution in any way to the challenging dynamics at play, and this can lead to things becoming even more difficult.

To shift the dynamics of tricky situations, everyone present in a challenging encounter needs to be 'in the equation'.

By challenging encounters, we mean:

***Any interaction between two or more people
where there are difficult dynamics
with heightened emotions attached.***

We place a strong emphasis on acting compassionately in challenging encounters.

We see compassion as:

Seeing one's self in the other.

If others feel they are being treated compassionately by you, their response with the challenging encounter will significantly improve.

Principles of having courageous conversations

Principles are important to guide us when we face uncertainty, which is often the case when handling challenging encounters.

The following can be very useful:

- We have a right to keep ourselves safe
- It's a challenging situation, not difficult people
- We all behave unwisely from time to time – it could be you today, me tomorrow
- Listening until we understand is fundamental to handling challenging encounters
- Do not assume malicious intent
- Where strong feelings are involved, these need to be heard and acknowledged

Aims in Challenging Encounters

- To first make a judgement about your and other people's physical safety.
- To overcome your own fears, feelings and judgements which might block your best practice.
- To **hear** people's concerns, feelings and needs – to make them **feel** heard. To take their story seriously.
- To help yourself and the other party – remember that this is not a personal 'attack'.
- To give accurate information to help clear up misunderstandings.
- To open channels for further communication should it be needed.
- To satisfy needs of the situation if possible or direct to appropriate others.
- To maintain good service and a professional image of your organisation.
- To end the encounter assertively – seek help if needed.
- To consciously choose to let it go
- To organise debriefing if needed.

7 Steps to handling a difficult situation

1. Make a judgement about **physical safety**

2. 'Prepare the **heart**'
Clear from assumptions
Open to hear
Protected

3. Listen with **empathy**
Reflect **feelings** and **content**
Summarise **concerns**

4. **Where to** next?
What do they **need**?
Give information direct to the appropriate person
or process as needed
Respond wisely

5. End the encounter **assertively**
Seek help if necessary

6. **Let it go!**

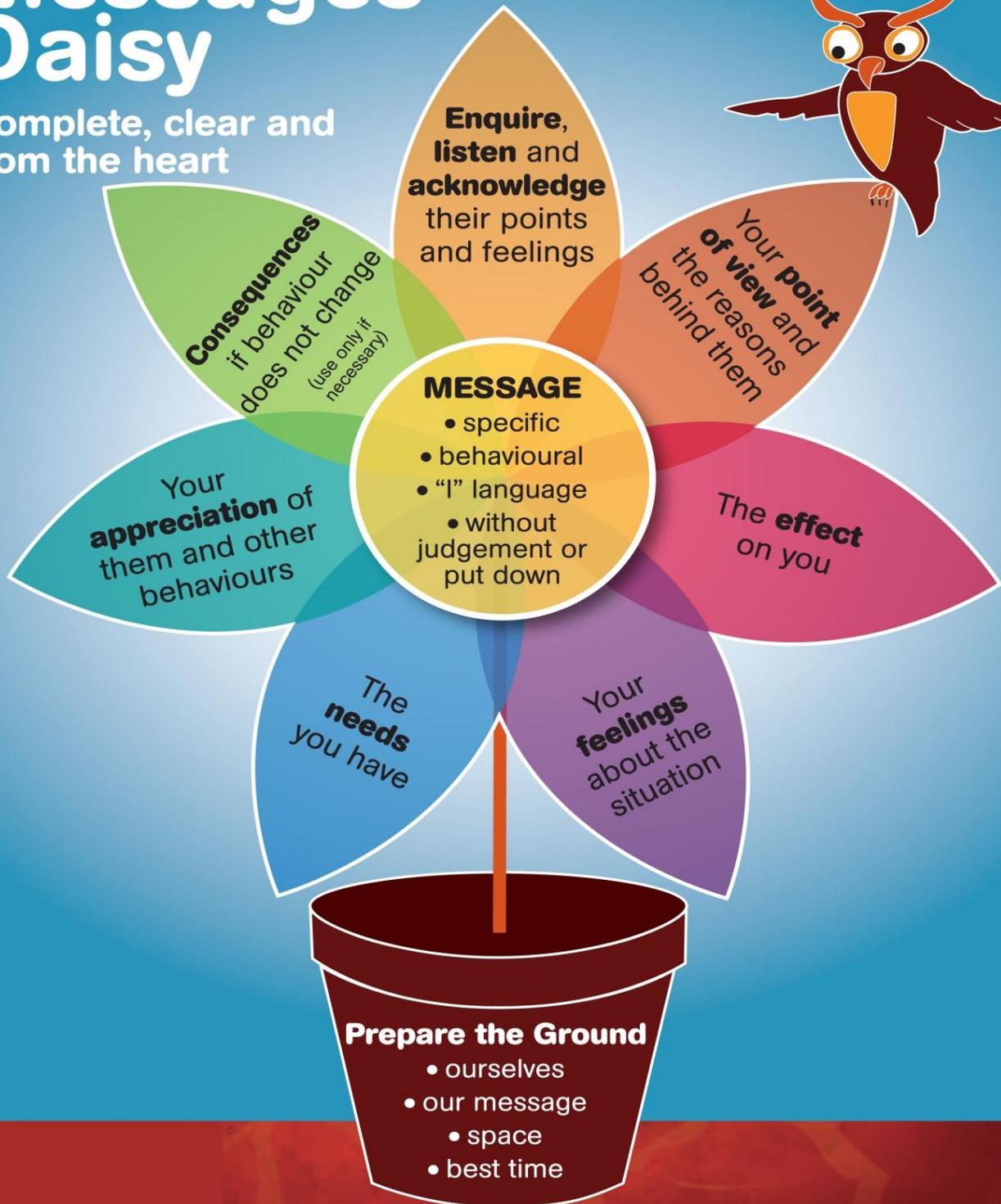
7. Organise **debriefing** if needed

Listening Stoppers – be aware of them!

- Inability to temporarily put aside our own feelings.
- Arguing back with logic or denial.
- Judging and jumping to conclusions.
- ‘Brick walling’– putting up a wall between you and the speaker so that nothing gets through.
- Putting in one’s own story.
- Agreeing or disagreeing.
- Reassurance.
- Solving or jumping in with advice.

Hearable Messages Daisy

Complete, clear and from the heart



Summary

Yes, dynamics between people can be challenging at times; and it does take some learning to handle tricky situations. However, it is an essential process if you want to work well with people.

At the Groupwork Institute, we work with a large array of individuals and organisations. In many workplaces, decision-making processes are unclear, and people who have important experience and wisdom to contribute to an issue are not part of the process. This causes people to be disgruntled, and feel less enthused about their work, and can lead to trouble of many kinds. When we worry about the time it requires to really hear others, it's worth thinking about the time that sorting out trouble from not doing it can take!

At our deepest level we want to collaborate with one another – it is a fundamental human need.

If you'd like to learn more...

There are two ways to do it. You can try to tackle this on your own, or you can get personal support, resources and training from us that will guide you towards better relationships with staff and clients and a more enjoyable and productive workplace.

Learn more about our [Challenging Encounters short course](#) (Limited space available)

Our next course will be **Tues 12 and Wed 13 September 2017 in Melbourne.**

See our range of [workplace training](#) for groups or organisations

www.groupwork.com.au