

Sticky Conversations



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Sticky conversations are called for when there's an issue that is important to you, yet talking about it with the person involved feels uncomfortable. Concern, frustration, irritation, or annoyance around someone's unintended (or intended) impact are prevalent.

Conflict resolution may be called for when these early warning signs arise and if skillfully addressed early on may prevent larger conflicts from blossoming.

How does one approach the initial "Sticky Conversation"?

Come Prepared.

Be ready to explain your point of view.

Have suggestions, not demands.

Come prepared to listen to others' thoughts and feelings.

Broaching the Subject.

Invite the person you wish to speak with to have a face to face conversation in the moment. Find a private place to sit down together, or suggest that you take a walk. My personal favorite is a walk because it is a bit out of the norm—it's private, and no one has a home turf advantage.

Do you have a minute? There is something I'd like to talk with you about.

State the Issue.

The way you _____ (what they are doing) _____ is a problem for me because _____. I'd like to talk about how we can do this a different way.

or

I have been giving our work a lot of thought lately and there is one area I'd like us to work on. It is _____.

or

I see that you _____ and I don't think that's working well. Let's talk about how else we could do this.

How would you say this in your own words?

Clarify that you would like to work with them to create a solution that feels like a "win" to everyone involved.

Ask them where they want to start.

Sometimes people want to jump right in and other times they'll want you to take the lead. Inviting the other person to start the conversation signals your willingness to work together.

When it's your turn to talk:

Pretend you are Mr. Spock, and stick closely to the facts. (Yes technically, Ambassador Spock, but that's a different story). Tell them about behavior that you personally have witnessed, and explain how it affects you. The only topic open for discussion is behavior (theirs and yours). In a Level 1 conversation, emotions, feelings, motives, judgments, and past events are not up for negotiation.

When you _____ then I _____.

Next time, I would appreciate it if you would _____.

Ask them how they see things.

So, what do YOU think?

I'd like to hear your reaction.

Listen attentively.

Let them speak without interrupting. Hold your questions until they have finished talking, then move to a dialogue.

Take the lead on following-up.

Make a note to yourself to mention the issue again in an appropriate amount of time—a few days, weeks, or months. If the resolution was successful, express that you appreciate how it turned out. If the resolution was not successful, rinse and repeat. In the event that the issue remains unresolved, you will need to move to our next guide:

How to Resolve a Conflict.