

# Recognizing the treasure in difficult conversations: Effective Communication with students, colleagues, parents and administrators

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2018 Difficult Conversations: Effective Communication with students,  
parents, educators, colleagues and administrators in post  
secondary education.

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# Aim of Session

The presentation aims to address the following questions:

- How can PSE Program administrators engage in effective communication with students, parents, educators, colleagues, and administrators about difficult topics?
- When perspectives vary, team members do not follow through, or discussions are unproductive, how can we problem solve those issues in an effective manner?
- Are there conversations that are not worth having because an issue has already been decided or is embedded in policy/standard?

# Measurable Outcomes

- Define and give examples of difficult conversations that may or need to occur when supporting transition age adults with I/DD
- Identify three strategies for engaging in or redirecting difficult conversations
- Understand the potential impact of effective communication in facilitating successful collaboration

# Difficult conversations

- What makes a conversation crucial is when there are high stakes, strong emotions, and varied opinions. This can include scenarios such as critiquing the work of colleagues or dealing with colleagues' lack of follow through or shared responsibility in a project (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002).

# When facing difficult conversations...

- We have OPTIONS:
  - AVOID
  - Face And Handle POORLY
  - Face And Handle WELL

# Getting on the Same Page

- Skilled people find a way to get all relevant info (from themselves and others) out in the open
- Skilled people make it safe for everyone to add meaning
- Individuals need accurate and relevant information, to make better choices

# STEPS

- Step 1: Prepare by walking through the 3 conversations
- Step 2: Check your purposes and decide whether to raise the issue
- Step 3: Start from the Third Story
- Step 4: Problem-Solving

# Step 1 :Prepare by walking through the 3 conversations

- *WHAT HAPPENED* Conversation
- *THE FEELINGS* Conversation
- *IDENTITY* Conversation



# Step 2: Check your purposes and decide whether to raise the issue

- If you raise it, 3 purposes that work:
  - Learning their story
  - Expressing your views & feelings
  - Problem solving together

# Step 3: Start from the Third Story

- Think like a mediator
- Describe the problem as the difference between your stories.
- Include both viewpoints as a legitimate part of the discussion.
- The Conspiracy of Silence™

## Step 4: Problem Solving

- It takes 2 to agree
- Ask what standards should apply
- You may have to give
- 80% comfortable

# Vignettes

- preparing for transition
- addressing challenging behaviors
- accepting career realities
- supporting self-determination
- establishing parent boundaries
- advocating for true inclusion on the college campus
- Potential conversations with faculty, administrators, employers/  
community partners, parents, colleagues, and students

# Vignette one

- During a person centered planning meeting divorced parents of a student have differing opinions regarding the their daughter's employment goals. One parent is insistent that she wants to live near the college campus after graduation and work where she can access public transportation. The other parent is insistent that their daughter should live near the family home because they have community connections to find her a job, although she would have to rely on uber or family for transportation. The student would like to live near campus, but doesn't want to disappoint the other parent. Prior to the meeting the family included program directors in a chain of email communications that contained negative and private dialogue that did not relate to the student's involvement in their post-secondary program.
- For this difficult conversation, how would you recommend supporting the student in advocating and then as the meeting begins how do you set appropriate communication boundaries with the family?

# Vignette two

- A local student applies to the program, but was denied admission based on the admissions committee decision. Recommendations for skill development were provided in the admission decision letter. The family reaches out to request a conversation to gain a better understanding of why their daughter was denied admission to the program. Because the family was local, they were referred to the program by a local service provider and had made the assumption that their daughter would be admitted and had no backup plan.
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- How would you approach this difficult conversation?

# Vignette three

- A student who loves photography and is very excited about the photography course she is taking this semester. Unfortunately, a few weeks into the course the faculty member teaches the course email you (as program director) about several challenging behaviors the student is engaging in during class that is disrupting the flow of the lecture and distracting peers. Additional concerns were raised regarding the student's performance in completing the course work and his communication skills with the faculty outside of the class. A behavior plan is implemented, but as the semester goes on, not effective.
- How would you have a conversation with faculty so that they feel supported in addressing the behavior challenges and how would you approach the issues with the student?
- How would you have the difficult conversation with the student and their family to inform them, the best choice is to drop the course?

# Vignette four

- One of the students in your program sets her vocational goal for “dancing with the stars” or being a neurosurgeon. The family has not necessarily taken any steps to reshape this dream.



# Vignette Five

- A student lives on university housing with three other students. The four students have a easy going friendship and have a pleasant living arrangement. Three of the four students enjoy going to football games, preparing meals together and are members of student organizations. The other student enjoys more solo activities, has limited cooking skills, has a great job and is satisfied with her quality life. Parents of the one student often ask the other students to include their adult child in social activities, or to cook with or to invite the student just to hang out. This conversation takes place without the student knowing that the parents are speaking with the roommates. The three students are very uncomfortable with these request, and have voiced their concern to their advisor. How would you have a difficult conversation with the family members so that you honor their intention but help them to see that their student is living a self-determined life?

# Share your story

- Is there a scenario or a challenge you would like to discuss? Is there a difficult conversation you have been avoiding?

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