

SENTENCE STARTERS AND SCRIPTS FOR **DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS**



GUIDE

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA HUMAN RESOURCES

This guide offers practical sentence starters and scripts to help you initiate and manage difficult conversations at work with confidence and clarity.



Starting the Conversation

"I'd like to have a conversation about [topic]. When would be a good time for you?"

"I want to check in about something that's been on my mind. Can we talk?"

"I value our working relationship, and I'd like to discuss something that I think could help us work even better together."

Expressing Concerns Without Blame

"I've noticed [specific behavior] and I wanted to better understand your perspective on it."

"When [situation] happens, I feel [emotion]. Can we talk about how we might handle this differently?"

"I want to make sure we're on the same page about [issue]. Can we clarify expectations?"

Addressing Conflict Directly

"I think we may see this differently, and I'd like to understand your point of view."

"I want to work through this together. What do you think would be a good path forward?"

"It seems like we're experiencing some tension around [topic]. How can we address this constructively?"

Giving Feedback

"I really appreciate the work you did on [task], and I have some thoughts on how we might improve it even more."

"I noticed [specific action], and I think it impacted [result] in [way]. Let's talk about how we can adjust moving forward."

"Would you be open to some feedback on [specific area]?"

Receiving Feedback

"Thank you for sharing that with me. I'd like to understand more—can you give me an example?"

"I appreciate the feedback. Can we discuss some possible solutions together?"

"That's helpful to hear. I'll take some time to reflect and follow up with any questions."

Ending on a Positive Note

"I appreciate you taking the time to talk through this with me."

"I'm glad we could have this conversation. Let's check in again soon to see how things are going."

"I value our collaboration and look forward to working through this together."