



Before the

CONVERSATION

THE THREE I'S: INQUIRE, INTEND, INVITE

The most important part of a hard conversation is preparing for it! The three I's will give you actionable advice so you're ready to have your hard conversations.



OUTCOMES & OVERVIEW

This module will guide you through the three steps you need to take to prepare for the hard conversation you need to have. You will learn about the importance of the three “I’s”: Inquire, Intend, and Invite. By preparing for the hard conversation and connecting with your deeper motivation for having one, you’ll be well on your way to smooth sailing!

CHECKLIST

- Read through the module PDF
- Listen to the audio that accompanies the PDF
- Complete the Empowered Takeaways, including: the conflict quiz; getting clear on your communication style, skills, and struggles; setting a powerful intention for a hard conversation you want to have; and making an invitation that puts you and the other person at ease

OUTCOMES

By the time you are finished with this module, you will have completed a thorough self-inquiry about why you need to have a hard conversation. You’ll set a powerful intention for yourself about the hard conversation you’ll soon be engaging in. You will also gain clarity on how to invite the other person into a win-win conversation in which both of your needs are addressed. Lastly, you’ll clarify your motives and feel calm, confident, and grounded well before your conversation.



Inquire

Hard conversations signal to our brains a sense of “danger,” whether it is real or imagined. When we feel threatened, we move into fight or flight. This makes it difficult to get clear on who we are and what we want. But in order to have the hard conversations, we need to be willing to dig deeper and move into a state of meaningful self-inquiry.

Inquiry is about gaining clarity about who we are (including our strengths and challenges) and what drives us.

One of the first places we need to get clarity is in how we communicate with other people. From a young age, women are hard-wired to make peace with others (even if it’s at their own expense). We are taught by society to display passive behavior that essentially says, “You win, I lose.” Sometimes, we move in the opposite direction; we go into defense mode and an “I win, you lose” mentality—ready to do battle and fight to the death for what we want. Then there are those times when communication is tense, uncomfortable, and passive-aggressive. Nobody is really saying what they want to. In this case, both parties lose out on the opportunity to communicate honestly, and to learn how to move through the difficult spaces together.

TIP

Practice before the conversation. Stand in front of a mirror and imagine that you are talking to the person you need to have a hard conversation with. Without censoring yourself, say what you really wish you could say to them. For example, you might want to tell your roommate, “I wish you would ask me before inviting other people over to our apartment on a weeknight.” Notice how that feels. Now, do it again, but this time, focus on speaking from your heart, which means taking responsibility for your feelings, and being transparent without blaming the other person. For example, “I get up early in the mornings during the week, so good sleep is super important to me. I’d love to talk about how we can both get our needs met while we’re living together.” Notice the difference in how that feels.

When you move into a hard conversation, it's important to be assertive in your behavior and communication.

When we talk about things that are difficult, and confront attitudes within ourselves and each other that we don't want to look at, it's vital that we practice assertive communication by maintaining an openness and curiosity that honors both us and the person we need to talk to.

Consider your default mode of communicating. Are you more passive (“I lose, you win”), more aggressive (“I win, you lose”), passive-aggressive (“We both lose because we're not communicating,”) or assertive (“We both win”)?

Does this change depending on whom you're interacting with?

Don't judge yourself. Our communication styles are complex, and we don't usually have conscious control over them. Getting clear about how you communicate can be a great way to figure out the skills you already have, and the ones you want to develop.

TIP

Get out any pent-up anger before your conversation. Dissipate any tension that might be there by working out, screaming into a pillow, venting to a trusted friend, or writing your resentments down on a piece of paper and then tearing it up.



EMPOWERED TAKEAWAY

What's your default style of communicating when you're face-to-face with conflict? If you don't know, **TAKE THIS QUIZ.**



What skills do you have that will help you in a hard conversation (e.g., patience, empathy, directness, trustworthiness, a great sense of humor, clarity in how you communicate, etc.)?



EMPOWERED TAKEAWAY (CONTINUED)

What do you struggle with when it comes to having a hard conversation (e.g., too impatient, quick temper, shaky nerves, tend to take care of others before yourself, etc.)?



Intend

Now that you've taken time for reflecting on your communication style, you're ready to set a clear intention for your hard conversation.

The best intention you can set for a hard conversation is to be real, speak the truth, express vulnerability, be courageous, and connect with yourself and others. Doesn't that sound easy? NOT! :)

No matter what, your intention should be about empowering yourself rather than trying to achieve a specific outcome. So, what exactly does that mean? When we are trying to get someone to behave the way we want, we end up pushing our own agenda and not connecting with them authentically. We don't allow ourselves to make space for whatever needs to happen. That's when we get pushback, anger, and resistance.

When it comes down to it, there's no such thing as a *good* or *bad* intention. There are simply effective and not-so-effective intentions. If you make intention-setting about getting something out of someone else (e.g., "I want them to apologize for being so rude to me") rather than honoring and staying connected to yourself (e.g., "I want to be compassionate to myself, especially when I feel fear or doubt"), you will be disappointed. That's because, at the end of the day, there's only one person whose actions and reactions you have any control over: YOU.

TIP

Get real about your relationship with the other person. Before you talk to them, write down any past shit you have with them that might make it hard for you to really hear them out. Commit to staying open to this person, no matter what.

So let's think about setting our intentions from a different angle. What do you want to get out of the hard conversation? What is something that you want for yourself, no matter how the other person reacts? For example, do you want to be a better communicator? Do you want to improve your self-esteem? Or, do you simply want to stand up for yourself?

When we reflect on what we want, we start taking responsibility, and we stay connected to our integrity and power.

Sure, we might want the other person to see things our way, which is totally normal. After all, we're only human. When we're having a hard conversation, our first instinct is to get our point across and be heard, or to convince someone else of why they're wrong. But we can't count on getting our way. In fact, it's really important to not have expectations walking into a hard conversation.

Instead of coming in with an agenda, you can stay connected to the intention you set, no matter what. After all, it's not about getting someone else to do what you want; it's about standing in what you believe in, no matter how they react!

TIP

Get clear about your agendas. Write down any agendas you might have about the conversation ("I want her to be nicer to me and to admit it when she's wrong." "I want him to see things my way."). Set your intent to release those agendas and commit to staying present.



EMPOWERED TAKEAWAY

Why are you having this conversation, to begin with? Write down all your reasons. Be honest with yourself.



What are you hoping to get out of the conversation?



EMPOWERED TAKEAWAY (CONTINUED)

What is an intention you are setting for the conversation, for *yourself*, that you are committed to honoring, regardless of whether or not you get your desired outcome?



Invite

Now that you are clear about how you communicate and you've set a powerful intention for yourself, you're ready to have a hard conversation.

Telling someone that you want to sit down and have a serious talk with them is never fun—not for you or for the other person. That's why it's crucial to turn this into an invitation. Think about it. When we receive personal invitations to events that are meaningful to the person inviting us, we feel more connected to them.

So, how exactly do you invite another person into a hard conversation? First of all, don't take them by surprise. Let them know you'd like to talk. Don't go into details; just make it known that this conversation will offer you both uninterrupted time to discuss what's on your mind. Give them time to respond to your invitation.

Be sure to make it not just about you, or them, but about your relationship itself.

Instead of speaking generally, as in "I need to talk to you about some things," reach out to them, briefly mention the situation you want to talk about, and say something like, "I'd love to tell you what's up for me, and then I want to hear what you're thinking and feeling."

A hard conversation requires consent from both parties involved. Remember, they have the right to say no. If this is the case, you can still make it clear that you're willing to do what you can to make sure they feel listened to and that you're not just going to unload a bunch of complaints on them.

Also, be specific about how much time you'd like and when it would be best to have the conversation. Catching up for ten minutes in between stressful midterms is probably not ideal. Pick a time when you can both give your utmost attention to each other without any external distractions.

TIP

Before the conversation, set some ground rules that will help you both feel safe. Most people aren't going to walk into a conversation thinking about their safety, so be sure you bring it up first. For example, "It's important to me that we both feel we can say what we need to, and know that it's going to be heard and respected." Let them know you aren't coming into this conversation—hard as it is—with guns blazing.

When you send the invitation, empathize with how they feel.

Be open to hearing what their terms are. Let go of agendas. Schedule the conversation on their time, if necessary. Be very conscious that their comfort zone might be a lot smaller than yours, so approach them with compassion.

On the flip side, if you are the person who is agreeing to have a hard conversation that someone else is initiating, be clear on whether or not you are truly ready to have that talk. If you are, make your needs known—and also, while it might feel scary, respond to the other person's invitation with graciousness and openness. If you go in with the expectation that at the very least, you'll walk away from the conversation having learned more about yourself and the other person—most likely, you actually will.

Now, let's discuss location. While meeting in person is preferable, chances are you won't always be able to have your hard conversations face to face. If that is the case, try for phone or FaceTime. As we've already mentioned, communication can get lost in translation over text, making it easy to misinterpret what is being said. Also, if you're having a conversation over the comments section on social media, it can get blown way out of proportion—not to mention, your friends and followers will be reading the conversation and might even jump in now and then, which complicates matters even more. In fact, you should always assume that if you're talking to someone on social, way more people are listening than just the ones you're addressing.

Whatever you do, invite the person to the conversation to create the opportunity for deeper understanding.

EMPOWERED TAKEAWAY

How can you make your invitation as inviting as possible? Write your invitation in the space below. Text it to a trusted friend and ask for honest feedback.



Make a commitment to when you will send the other person your invitation. After you make the invitation, write down what occurred in the space below. If the person said no, write about your feelings and reflect on where you'd like to go from here.

