

# DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

What exactly are difficult conversations? In every person’s life, situations will arise that may be difficult to talk about, carry heightened emotions, and/or involve different perceptions of the same reality. Whether between roommate(s), friends, classmates or even family members, tackling the issues with an open, honest conversation and using some practical strategies can help identify the conflicts and begin to work on solutions.



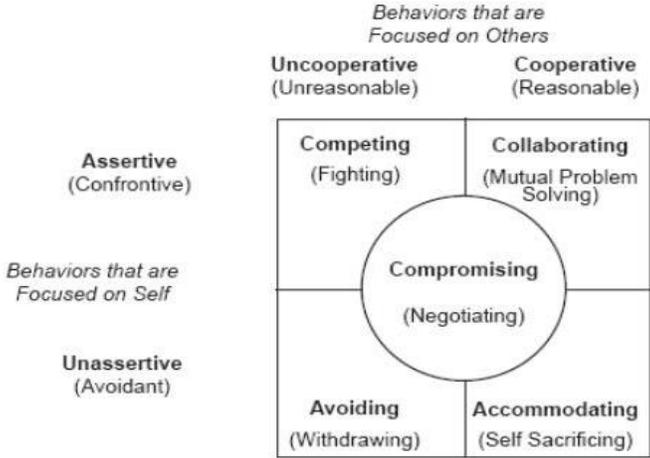
## Step 1: Self-Reflection

Approach a difficult conversation by asking yourself some questions:

1. What is my purpose for having the conversation? Make sure that your intentions for wanting to approach the conversation are to problem solve to reach an honorable goal. Avoid trying to determine who is right and who is wrong in a situation.
2. What assumptions am I making about this person’s intentions? Don’t assume that their intent is the same as their impact, meaning they may have unintentionally hurt you without realizing the impact of what happened.
3. What are my feelings? First, acknowledge what happened and that you have been hurt. Sort through what happened and remind yourself that feelings are based on perceptions which are negotiable for you and for them. Everyone’s perceptions of events depend on past experiences, assumptions, values, and information.

## Step 2: Understand your Conflict Management Style

Knowing your conflict management style will help you to be cognizant of the possibilities of how you could affect someone else/your relationship with that person. The styles are as follows:



1. Accommodating—An individual will focus on the human relationships and neglect their own concerns to meet the needs of the other person. Advantage: Accommodating helps maintain relationships. Disadvantage: Accommodating may not reach the best solution or be the most productive.
2. Avoiding—An individual prefers to ignore the conflict rather than confront it. Tends to bend on personal goals. Advantage: May help maintain relationships that could be hurt by conflict

resolution. Disadvantage: Conflict stays unsolved, can lead to feeling taken advantage of by the other person.

3. Collaborating—An attempt to work with others on finding a solution that works for both parties involved. Advantage: Both sides have a solution they are happy with and there are no negative feelings. Disadvantage: Collaborating is very time consuming and takes a lot of emotional work.
4. Competing—An individual will focus on their own concerns over the others. Advantage: If it is the best decision the competing style will lead to a better decision. Disadvantage: Leads to hostility and resentment towards the person using the competing style.
5. Compromising—An individual is willing to sacrifice some of their goals while convincing others to give up some of their goals as well. Advantage: Relationships are maintained and conflicts are removed. Disadvantage: Compromise may create less than ideal outcomes.

### Step 3: Practice.

1. Take time to practice this conversation with a friend. Remember to stay calm and purposeful throughout.
2. Mentally practice the conversation. Think of possible scenarios that could come about in the situation and practice how you would handle these different possibilities.
3. Write out your emotions/vent in order to prevent them from boiling over during the actual conversation.



### Additional Resources

1. University Counseling Service supports mental well-being, nurtures student success, and contributes to a safe, welcoming, and multiculturally-aware campus community.  
Address: 3223 Westlawn S., Iowa City, IA 52242  
Phone: (319) 335-7294  
Website: <https://counseling.studentlife.uiowa.edu/>
2. The Office of the Ombudsperson serves students, faculty, and staff by offering a confidential, neutral, and independent dispute resolution service. The Ombudsperson's mission is to ensure that all members of the University community receive fair and equitable treatment within the University system.  
Address: 108 Seashore  
Phone: (319) 335-3608  
Email: [ombudsperson@uiowa.edu](mailto:ombudsperson@uiowa.edu)  
Website: <http://www.uiowa.edu/ombuds/>

