

# NAVIGATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS



**Welcome to the workshop**

Over the next 90min we will help you navigate the choppy waters of **Difficult Conversations in the Workplace**

Please take a seat



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# Navigating Difficult Conversations in the Workplace

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## Workshop Facilitators

Emma May

Katie Thorn

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# Using Emotional Intelligence to Navigate Difficult Conversations



**1. Self-Awareness**

**2. Self-Management**

**3. Social Awareness**

**4. Relationship Management**



# Using Emotional Intelligence to Navigate Difficult Conversations



**1. Self-Awareness**

## **Difficult Conversations**

- Negotiating
- Persuading
- Influencing
- Conflict Resolution
- Transformational Leadership

**2. Self-Management**

**3. Social Awareness**

**4. Relationship Management**

# 1. Self-Awareness

**1. Self-Awareness**

- Emotional Awareness
- Accurate Self-Assessment
- Self-Confidence

**2. Self-Management**

**3. Social Awareness**

**4. Relationship Management**

# Review Comments – Emotional Response

## How does this make you feel...?

A Phase III, Single-arm, International, Multi-centre Study to Evaluate the Efficacy of Separating the Person from the Problem during Difficult Conversations in a Biostatistical Setting

### 5.11 Efficacy Evaluation

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#### 5.11.1 Primary Endpoint – Attendees Satisfaction with Difficult Conversation Workshop

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##### 5.11.1.2 Missing Data Rules

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##### 5.11.1.3 Multiplicity

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RUDELL Sam  
Proin gravida dolor  
Reply

RUDELL Sam  
Optimistic?  
Reply

RUDELL Sam  
natoque penatibus et natoque penatibus et  
Reply

RUDELL Sam  
Cras mattis consectetur purus  
19 May 2026, 20:16  
Reply

# Review Comments – Emotional Response



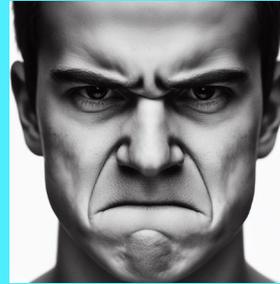
## Glad

- Content
- Happy
- Cheerful
- Elated
- Joyful



## Sad

- Depressed
- Unhappy
- Gloomy
- Pessimistic
- Miserable



## Mad

- Angry
- Upset
- Irritated
- Grouchy
- Furious



## Scared

- Afraid
- Anxious
- Fearful
- Panicked
- Shaken



# Task 1: Becoming Self-Aware

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Using the conference app

Consider your emotional response to 4 scenarios

Record your immediate reaction

**Glad**

**Sad**

**Mad**

**Scared**

## 2. Self-Management

1. Self-Awareness

2. Self-Management

3. Social Awareness

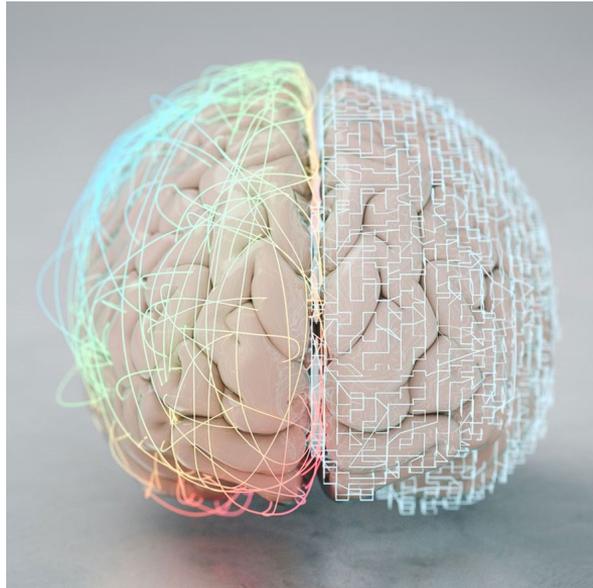
4. Relationship Management

- Quick Emotional Response
- Slower Rational Response

# Emotional vs Rational Brain

## Emotional Brain

- Immediate response (gut reaction)
- Irrational & bias
- Value-driven
- Intuitive & authentic



## Rational Brain

- Slower process
- Deliberate & analytical
- Information-driven
- Logical & thoughtful

# Task 2: Developing Self-Management #1

A colleague is leaving. Their new role is exciting, but you liked working with them and valued their support, and relied on them for chatting through issues

## Emotional response:

- Sad, lonely, vulnerable
- Demotivated at work, gloomy out of work
- Disengaged from your shared project

## Possible rational response?



# Task 2: Developing Self-Management #2

Your line manager has reassigned you to a new project, one that is misaligned with your career goals

## Emotional response:

- Frustrated, resentful, angry
- Argumentative with line manager
- Uncooperative to new team members
- Complaining to other colleagues

## Possible rational response?



# Task 2: Developing Self-Management #3

You are discussing holiday plans with a partner.  
You want a beach holiday. They want to go hiking.

Glad

## Emotional response:

- Excited, energetic, talkative
- Sharing beach locations and seaside Airbnbs
- Encouraging agreement

## Possible rational response?



# Task 2: Developing Self-Management #4

You've been asked to validate the primary endpoint TFLs on your study - specifically by programming from raw data.

## Emotional response:

- Panic, fear, overwhelmed
- Procrastination followed by stressful and haphazard attempts to get started

## Possible rational response?

Scared



# 3. Social Awareness

1. Self-Awareness

2. Self-Management

3. Social Awareness

4. Relationship Management

- Consideration
- Understanding
- Empathy

# Really How Different can Perspectives be?



## The Renter

"The rent is already too high"

"With other costs going up, I can't afford to pay more for housing"

"I am a desirable tenant with no dogs or cats"

"She is cold and distant; she never asks me how things are"



## The Landlord

"The rent has not been increased for a long time"

"With other costs going up, I need more rental income"

"His loud music drives me crazy"

"I am a considerate person who never intrudes on a tenant's privacy"



# Social Awareness in Action

## 1. Open Questions

## 2. Mirroring

## 3. Disclosing

Curious, non-judgmental questions enabling honest responses

**What...?**

"What are your priorities in this situation?"

**How...?**

"How do you feel about that?"

**Can you...?**

"Can you help me understand?"

**Why...?**

"Why do you think this happened?"

How does this help during a difficult conversation?

**Encourages Dialogue**

**Gains Insight**

**Builds Trust**



# Social Awareness in Action

1. Open Questions

2. Mirroring

3. Disclosing

Reflecting the speaker's words and emotions to make them feel heard

*Repeating*

"You are frustrated by the lack of communication."

*Paraphrasing*

"It sounds like you feel your input is not valued."

*Clarifying*

"Can you explain what you mean by....?"

"If I understand correctly, ..."

How does this help during a difficult conversation?

**Increases Understanding**

**Builds Trust**

**Facilitates Problem-Solving**



# Social Awareness in Action

1. Open Questions

2. Mirroring

3. Disclosing

Sharing your own thoughts, feelings, or experiences to foster understanding and openness

*Thoughts*

"This is a new situation for me."

*Feelings*

"I am concerned that I will not finish in time."

*Experiences*

"When I first started, I also found this hard."

How does this help during a difficult conversation?

**Builds Trust**  
**Enhances Empathy**  
**Reduces Tension**



# Let's Revisit our Example



## The Renter

"The rent is already too high"

"Well, the rent is already high, I am concerned about the impact the proposed increase will have on me."

"I am a desirable tenant with no dogs  
"Yes, particularly bills. Living alone I have to cover everything myself."

"She is cold and distant; she never asks me how things are"

## The Landlord

"Hi, how are you? What are your thoughts on the updated rental agreement?"

"With other costs going up, I need more rental income"

"I see, you are worried that if rent goes up you won't be able to afford other items."

"His loud music drives me crazy"

"Yes, I remember how hard it was to cover everything when I lived on my own."

To be continued....

# Let's Revisit our Example



## The Renter

"The rent is already too high"

"Well, the rent is already high, I am concerned about the impact the proposed increase will have on me."

"I am a desirable tenant with no dogs  
"Yes, particularly bills. Living alone I have to cover everything myself."

"She is cold and distant; she never asks me how things are"

## The Landlord

"Hi, how are you? What are your thoughts on the updated rental agreement?"

"With other costs going up, I need

"I see, you are worried that if rent goes up you won't be able to afford other items."

"His loud music drives me crazy"

"Yes, I remember how hard it was to cover everything when I lived on my own."

To be continued....



# Task 3: Becoming Socially Aware

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Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3
CRO & Pharma	Line Management & Line Report	Statistical Lead & Clinical Lead

## TASK

Use the strategies we have discussed to **understand the feelings and motives** of the other person in your difficult conversation

You have 10 minutes

**\*\*Taking notes may be helpful as we'll ask you to share your findings with the room\*\***

# Task 3: Becoming Socially Aware – Hints

## 1. Open Questions

*What...?*

*How...?*

*Can you...?*

*Why...?*

"What are your priorities?"

"How do you feel about that?"

"Can you help me understand?"

"Why do you think this happened?"

## 2. Mirroring

*Repeating*

*Paraphrasing*

*Clarifying*

"I hear that you are..."

"It sounds like you feel..."

"If I understand correctly, ..."

## 3. Disclosing

*Thoughts*

*Feelings*

*Experiences*

"This is a new situation for me."

"I am concerned that..."

"When I first started, I also found..."



# 4. Relationship Management

1. Self-Awareness

2. Self-Management

3. Social Awareness

- Influencing
- Negotiating
- Conflict resolution
- Transformational leadership

4. Relationship Management

# It is not all about the win

Our goal is to build (or maintain) a strong working relationship



What not to do...



What to do...

# A Drama: The Last Orange

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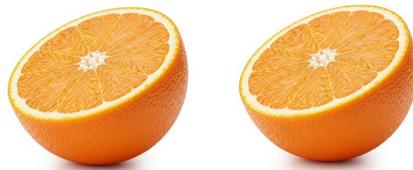
- There is one orange left in the fruit bowl
- Two siblings both **NEED** the orange
- How do they resolve this?

# Defining “Win-Win” is Not Always Easy

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Win-Lose



Lose-Lose



Win-Win



# How to Get to the Win-Win

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1. Separate the Person from the Problem

2. Use Objective Criteria

3. Find the Common Denominator

# Separate the Person from the Problem

A Phase III, Single-arm, International, Multi-centre Study to Evaluate the Efficacy of Separating the Person from the Problem during Difficult Conversations in a Biostatistical Setting

## 5.11 Efficacy Evaluation

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#### 5.11.1.2 Missing Data Rules

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#### 5.11.1.3 Multiplicity

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The screenshot shows a vertical chat interface with three messages from 'RUDELL Sam'. Each message has a 'Reply' input field below it. The messages are:

- Message 1: "Proin gravida dolor" (with a redacted name)
- Message 2: "Optimistic?" (with a redacted name)
- Message 3: "natoque penatibus et natoque penatibus et" (with a redacted name)

Each message also includes a timestamp and a '19 May 2026, 20:16' date.

# Separate the Person from the Problem



Focus on the  
issue, not the  
individual involved



Avoid personal  
attacks



Separate feelings  
from facts



# How to Get to the Win-Win

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1. Separate the Person from the Problem

**2. Use Objective Criteria**

3. Find the Common Denominator

# What Constitutes Objective Criteria

Independence

Legitimacy

Mutual Agreement

Application

They come from external sources



EUROPEAN MEDICINES AGENCY  
SCIENCE MEDICINES HEALTH



**U.S. FOOD & DRUG**  
ADMINISTRATION



**ICH**  
harmonisation for better health

# What Constitutes Objective Criteria

Independence

**Legitimacy**

Mutual Agreement

Application

The criteria should be based on fair standards



# What Constitutes Objective Criteria

Independence

Legitimacy

**Mutual Agreement**

Application

Both parties should agree on  
the criteria



# What Constitutes Objective Criteria

Independence

Legitimacy

Mutual Agreement

Application

The criteria are used to evaluate options



# Requesting a Pay Rise without Objective Criteria



## The Line Report

“I want a raise to £60,000”

“I feel I deserve it and  
I want you to be flexible”

“I think you should in this case”



## The Manager

“I’d like to but that’s more  
than we offer for your level”

“We have salary bands,  
and I can’t break those”

# Requesting a Pay Rise with Objective Criteria



## The Line Report

“I want a raise to £60,000”

“My recent performance review indicated I am performing above what is common for my level. I have also reviewed industry data and see that £60,000 is common for people of my experience level”



## The Manager

“I’d like to but that’s more than we offer for your level”

“That is useful for me to take to HR. I will see what I can do!”



# How to Get to the Win-Win

---

1. Separate the Person from the Problem

2. Use Objective Criteria

3. Find the Common Denominator

# Find the Common Denominator

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$$\frac{a}{x} + \frac{b}{y} = \frac{ay + bx}{xy}$$

What do you both want from the discussion?  
Find the common ground.

Project to be  
a success

Good quality

Statistically  
robust

Benefit  
patients



# Task 4: Navigating to the Win-Win

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Time to go back to your scenario

## **TASK**

Find a conclusion to your difficult conversation using the skills from this section.

**Can you find the Win-Win?**

**You have 10 minutes**

**\*\*At the end of 10 minutes, we'll ask you to share your conclusions with the room\*\***



# Task 4: Navigating to get to Win-Win - Hints

Find the Win-Win	May not be obvious. Listen to the other person. Never Split the Difference
Separate the Person from the Problem	Focus on the issue. Avoid personal attacks. Separate feelings from facts
Use Objective Criteria	Four components: Legitimacy, Independence, Mutual Agreement, Application
Find the Common Denominator	What is the common ground? What are the shared values?



# How will you apply this in your role?

You each have an action card to complete to support you through your next difficult conversation.

## Difficult Conversations: Follow-up Action Card

To help you put today's learning into practice in your role, use the table below to prepare for an upcoming difficult conversation.

Difficult Conversation Aid		
Scenario:		
Initial position:		
<b>Self-Awareness</b>	What is your emotional response?	
<b>Self-Management</b>	What could your rational response be?	
<b>Social Awareness</b>	How could you elicit the other person's feelings and motive?	
<b>Relationship Management</b>	What are your objective criteria? What is the important common denominator(s)? What could a Win-Win look like?	

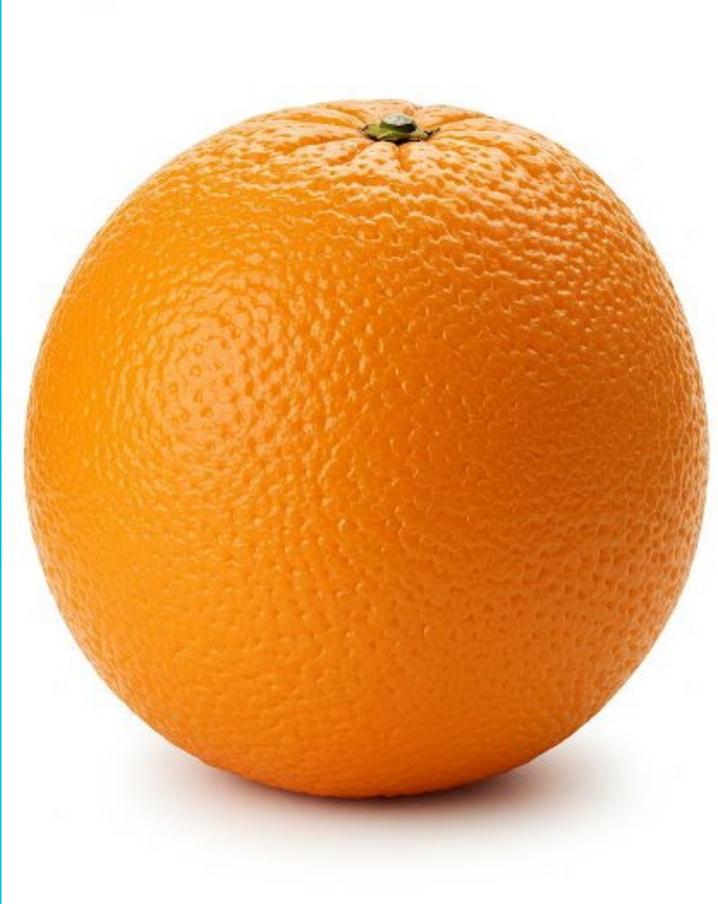
# Q&A

and complete follow up action card

# Conclusion

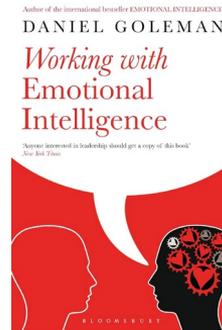
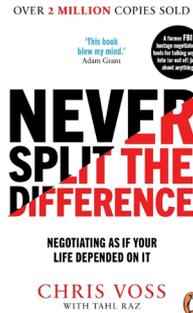
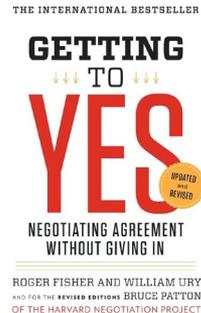
The outcome of a difficult conversation has a tangible impact on long term relationships. Having the skills to navigate these in a constructive way is critical to workplace success.

1. Recognize then manage the emotions you are bringing to the conversation
2. Go to your balcony to gain insight into the other people's perspectives
3. Be firm on the problem, kind on the people
4. Aim for the “win-win”



# Further Reading

- Getting to yes – Roger Fisher & William Ury
- Never split the difference – Chris Voss
- Working with Emotional Intelligence – Daniel Goleman
- Harvard Business School – Emotional Intelligence in Leadership: Why It's Important



**Harvard  
Business  
School**  
Online