

Speaking Up, Staying Connected

How to have hard conversations with the people who support you

Presented by Chou Hallegra, MA, CTCP

Chou Hallegra

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- Health & human services professional
- Rehabilitation counselor
- Researcher in training
- Lover of simple delights



Who is in the room?

- Which town and/or county do you live in?
- Are you a self-advocate or a support person?
- What are you hoping to gain from this training?



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WELCOME

Our agreements for today

Speak for yourself

Share your own story and feelings.

Breaks are okay

Step out any time you need to.

Passing is okay

You never have to share.

Be kind

Be respectful and supportive.

Grounded in SAMHSA's trauma-informed principles: safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment (SAMHSA, 2014).

WHY THIS MATTERS

MATTERS

You are in charge.

Speaking up is how your choices become real.
And asking for help is part of speaking up.

Research says: young people with disabilities who had stronger self-determination skills were more likely to have jobs and be active in their communities after school (Shogren et al., 2015).

OPENING ACTIVITY

Think of a time something bothered you

If you get support

- What happened?
- How did your body feel?
- Did you say something?

If you give support

- When did someone try to tell you something was wrong?
- How did you respond?

Share with a neighbor, draw it, or just think about it. All are okay.

THE PLAN

Five steps for a hard talk

1

Take time to prepare

2

Use “I” statements

3

Ask for what you need

4

Ask questions

5

Stay on the same team

And one more thing: **say thank you.**

STEP 1

Give yourself time to prepare

Before you talk, think about two things: **What is the problem?** How do you want things to be better?

Make sure you feel safe and calm. If your heart is beating fast, it is okay to wait.

You can bring a friend or family member to sit with you.

Try saying

- “I need a break before we talk about this.”
- “I need more time.”
- “Can we talk later? How about Friday at 2?”

Why this matters



A racing heart makes it hard to listen.

When our bodies are flooded with stress, it is harder to think clearly and hear each other. Taking a real break, often about 20 minutes, helps the body calm down before trying again.

Gottman, J. M., & Silver, N. (2015). *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (rev. ed.). Harmony. · SAMHSA (2014).

STEP 2

Use “I” statements

Instead of “You did this wrong,” talk about **how you feel** and **what happened**.

I feel _____
when _____.

This helps people listen without getting upset.

Try saying

- “I feel frustrated when my room isn’t cleaned the way I like it.”
- “I feel scared when I don’t know what is going on.”
- “I feel stressed when I am rushed.”

Why this matters

“You” words start fights. “I” words invite listening.



In a study of how people react to hard messages, blaming “you” statements made listeners feel angrier and less willing to help. Messages about the speaker’s own feelings got calmer, kinder responses.

Kubany, E. S., Richard, D. C., Bauer, G. B., & Muraoka, M. Y. (1992). Impact of assertive and accusatory communication of distress and anger. *Aggressive Behavior, 18*(5), 337–347.

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	“I feel ignored when I talk and no one answers.”

Now you try: pick your warm-up example and flip it.

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	“I feel ignored when I talk and no one answers.”
“You always move my stuff!”	

Now you try: pick your warm-up example and flip it.

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	“I feel ignored when I talk and no one answers.”
“You always move my stuff!”	“I feel upset when my things are moved without asking.”

Now you try: pick your warm-up example and flip it.

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	“I feel ignored when I talk and no one answers.”
“You always move my stuff!”	“I feel upset when my things are moved without asking.”
“You’re late again!”	

Now you try: pick your warm-up example and flip it.

PRACTICE · FLIP IT!

IT!

Turn “you” into “I”

Instead of…	Try…
“You never listen to me!”	“I feel ignored when I talk and no one answers.”
“You always move my stuff!”	“I feel upset when my things are moved without asking.”
“You’re late again!”	“I feel worried when I don’t know when you’re coming.”

STEP 3

Ask for what you need

It is okay to tell people **exactly** what would help. Say it nicely, in a calm voice. A calm voice helps others stay calm too.

People often want to help but don't know how you like things done. Be clear.

Show them if you can: a picture, a video, or a recording.

Try saying (As a parent/caregiver)

- "Next time, can you please let me know in advance who is going to be in the meeting?
- "Please ask me before you make any changes to the meals."
- "Please discuss any changes to the schedule as soon as you know."

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Show them if you can: a picture, a video, or a recording.

Try saying (self-advocate examples)

- "Next time, can you please ask me before you move my stuff?"
- "Please ask me what I want to eat before you make my meals."
- "Please tell me before you change the plans for the day."

Why this matters



Showing helps people understand.

Visual supports like pictures, schedules, and videos are an evidence-based practice for communication. They make expectations clear and take pressure off memory and words.

Steinbrenner, J. R., et al. (2020). *Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism*. FPG Child Development Institute, UNC.

STEP 4

Ask questions

Sometimes we get upset because we don't understand each other.

Repeat back what the person said to make sure you both understand.

If things are still not clear, it is okay to **ask**.

Try saying

- "So, you were late because the traffic was bad?"
- "You said we had to leave at 10. Why that time?"
- "Last time you did it differently. Can we do it like before?"

Why this matters



Repeating back helps people feel understood.

In a conversation study, people whose listener repeated back what they said (paraphrasing) felt more understood than people who got simple replies or advice.

Weger, H., Castle Bell, G., Minei, E. M., & Robinson, M. C. (2014). The relative effectiveness of active listening in initial interactions. *International Journal of Listening, 28*(1), 13–31.

STEP 5

Stay on the same team

You and the people who support you are a **team**, working together.

Look at the **problem**, not the person.

Someone doing things differently does not mean they don't care about you.

Try saying

- "How can we work together so this doesn't happen again?"
- "I want to try this a new way. Will you help me practice?"

Why this matters



The person is not the problem.
The problem is the problem.

Separating the problem from the person helps people work on it together instead of blaming each other. Collaborative approaches like supported decision-making build on this same idea.

White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. W. W. Norton. · Shogren, K. A., et al. (2019). *Supported Decision-Making*. Cambridge University Press.

DON’T FORGET

FORGET

Say thank you.

“I know things are not going well right now, but I know you are trying to help. Thank you!”

“I really liked how we worked together today. Thank you for listening to me.”

Research says: Thanking someone helps build and strengthen the relationship over time (Algoe, 2012).

FOR CAREGIVERS & SUPPORTERS

When someone speaks up to you

Listen to understand

Let them finish. Don’t rush to fix or explain.

Repeat it back

“So you’re saying you felt rushed this morning?”

Honor their choices

Ask, “What would help?” and follow their lead.

Keep your word

If you agree to talk later, show up at that time.

CLOSING ACTIVITY

What hard conversations do you need to have with those who support you?

support you?

What is the issue?

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- What needs to happen?
- What needs to stop?

What have you tried?

- What went well?
- What didn’t work?

What are your next steps?

- What do you need to do differently?
- Who/what else can help?

TAKE-HOME

HOME

My Speak-Up Plan

The problem is…

is

I feel _____ when _____.

What I need is…

A question I can ask…

Thank you for…

REMEMBER

It’s okay to ask for help.

1. Wait until you feel calm and safe.
2. Share how you feel, not who is wrong.
3. Be clear, and show if you can.
4. Repeat back and ask questions.
5. Face the problem together, then say thanks.



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Thank you!

You and your support team are on the same side.

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