

Restorative Conversation Framework

The Restorative Conversation Framework is an empathetic approach to conflict resolution that focuses on personal responsibility, empathy, and respect. An intentional Restorative approach fosters a compassionate, relationship-centered culture. These frameworks can be used for faculty, students, or staff to address conflict in the workplace or classroom setting.

Bookmarks:

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Restorative Conversation with One Person:

STEP 1. OPEN THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION. Let the individual know that you will listen to them and their perspectives, then do just that. This is not the time for lectures or judgment. Say:

- How's it going?
- I wanted to talk with you about _____ .

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STEP 2. ALLOW THEM TO EXPLAIN THE SITUATION FROM THEIR

PERSPECTIVE. Try to see the situation from their point of view. Be prepared to hear different versions of the story. Remember, people may often feel very differently about the same event. Say:

- What happened?
- Can you tell me more about _____ .
- What were you thinking at the time?
- What were you feeling?

STEP 3. IDENTIFY WHAT LED UP TO THE INCIDENT AND ANY ROOT CAUSES.

Help the individual gain a greater understanding of the situation by asking about what happened before or what else may have affected their behavior. Remember, people may have a very myopic view of what happened, and may need some assistance seeing the broader view and perspective. Say:

- It sounds like you felt _____. What made you feel that way?
- What happened before it started?
- What else do you think was going on with _____ ?
- Has this happened before?

STEP 4. IDENTIFY THE IMPACT. Help the individual see how their behavior affected those around them. They may need help understanding consequences they can't see, such as hurt feelings, broader organizational impact, etc. Say:

- What happened to you? To your manager? The other members of your team?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who else do you think has been affected/upset/ harmed by your actions? How?
- When I heard/saw _____, I felt _____ because I _____.
- What role do you think you played in this situation?

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- How do you feel now?

STEP 5. ADDRESS NEEDS AND REPAIR HARM. Help the employee decide how to make things better or solve the problem. Lead them to a resolution they can feel good about. Say:

- What can you do to make things better?
- If you were _____, what do you think you would need?
- What do you need to help you do that?
- What would you like to see happen?
- What could you do to make sure this doesn't happen again?
- What can you do differently next time?

STEP 6. CREATE AN AGREEMENT. This may be a verbal agreement, a checklist or even a written letter or contract between two employees. Say:

- Based on our talk, I heard that you will _____. I will also _____.
- Can we agree on this plan?
- I'm going to check on you in a while to see how things are going.
- Thank you for sharing with me! I'm so happy we can work together to make things better!

Restorative Conversation With Two People:

Step 1: Explain the Process

SCRIPT:

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Thank you both for being here. The purpose of this meeting is to develop empathy and for each person to express their feelings. Therefore, if we have unintentionally offended the other person, we need to take ownership for that and apologize.

There are a few goals for this conversation that I want to outline before we begin:

- Healing & Conversation: create the space to allow each of you to speak and truly hear one another.
 - *this is not about right or wrong, but about listening and then owning what we've done- even if it was intentional- so we can restore and repair relationships.*
 - *through this process we will focus on empathy, human experience, and the impact our actions have on others.*
- Resolution & Progress: come to a mutually proposed resolution that will allow us to work together effectively, and create a space where you can both thrive.
 - While we do not necessarily have to be friends after this, we must have respect for each other and act with respect and professionalism.
 - This process can be used to help work through conflict and problems in the future. That way, we are better skilled when faced with issues like these in the future.

Allow each individual to ask questions and make sure that they understand the purpose before moving on.

The other reason we want to have this conversation is because we often create issues within our own minds when we do not have closure. For example, if I walk down the hallway and pass a group of people and they start to laugh when I walk by, my brain will naturally think what?

Participant: "That they are laughing at you."

Me: "Correct!! But I don't know that for sure. Therefore, in order to reduce stress, fear, and anxiety with you two looking at each other in Zoom meetings (office, classroom, etc) we are going to go through this process so that fear, stress, and anxiety has been revealed because we have had a chance to reveal what we really think and feel."

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Step 2: Build Empathy

SCRIPT:

We hear the word empathy all the time, right? Empathy is when you are able to put yourself in someone else's shoes. You are able to do this by tapping into your own experiences and emotions. And it's actually a very powerful tool when it comes to relationships and working together. So let's take a step back for a second with a grounding exercise.

Follow these steps to connect and build empathy:

Ask participant 1: "Have you ever felt frustration?"

Reaffirm your own experiences by saying, "I too have felt frustration."

Ask participant 2 if they have felt frustration.

Continue this process but change the emotion or feeling and reaffirm each person's feeling—mad, sad, happy, joy, anger, embarrassed, etc.

Even though I may have not had your exact experience, I can put myself in your shoes because I have had those feelings. I do that by imagining myself to be you and experience that feeling. Then you do the same but for my feelings.

NOTE: the above can be skipped, unless helpful for an ice breaker in tense situations.

Today, participant 1, you are going to have empathy or put yourself into participant 2's shoes, and participant 2, you are going to have empathy or place yourself in participant 1's shoes. This is about seeing things through the other participant's eyes, not yours.

Step 3: Grounding Exercise

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Ask a participant, “I’d like you to describe your ideal work environment. What do you want your team and work environment to look, feel, and sound like?”

If they say, “I don’t know,” ask them if they want their work environment to be safe.

Ask the second participant, “Do you want their work environment to be safe?” (or what the first participant said they would like)

Continue this process, alternating between the participants. (HINT: After doing this numerous times, I have found that everyone wants their work environment to be safe, fun, and engaging, and to feel respected, feel heard, and be successful.)

Once the topic has been saturated, point out commonalities. Then state the obvious:

We all want the same things, but we all want to do it our own way. This is common for humans and ultimately the root of conflict and disagreement.

Step 4: Start the Conversation

Guidance regarding who speaks first:

- Staff relations: Adult who feels wronged
- Student relations: Student who feels wronged
- Blended: Student and faculty, always start with student so the faculty and/or adult can model empathy.

Start this step by saying okay, participant, you are going to explain your feelings using “I” statements to the best of your ability. Other participant, you will be practicing your empathy skills while they explain their feelings. I will help paraphrase and help you make “I” statements. We use “I” statements because this practice is not about placing blame, but expressing our feelings and being heard.

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Once the participant has finished, ask the other participant, “Was it your intention to make (participant) feel (name emotion)?”

If it was not your intention but you still did this, we need to make it right by apologizing.

Step 5: Paraphrasing and Guided Apology

Paraphrasing. When a participant makes a statement that is not an “I” statement, paraphrase the statement into an “I” statement and ask the participant if this is correct.

For example: Participant says, “You made fun of me in front of everyone!”

Paraphrase: “You felt embarrassed and upset when people made fun of you in front of others?” Check for head nod, or verbal affirmation. If the participant says no or shakes their head no, then try to paraphrase again.

Guided Apology. Start by saying, “(participant’s name), since it was not your intention to make (other participant’s name) feel (name feeling or feelings), but you did unintentionally make them feel bad, we need to make it right by apologizing.”

Prior to this conversation we all reviewed Dr. Lerner’s framework for effective apologies. As I shared previously, we are going to use that framework today.

Say, “(participant who was wronged or expressed feelings), I am sorry for (action) and causing you to feel (name emotion), it was not my intention. I am going to work on that.”

For example, “I am sorry for stating that joke and causing you to feel embarrassed and hurt, it was not my intention. I am going to work on that so that I don’t do that again.”

Harriet Lerner’s Nine Essential Ingredients to a True Apology:

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- Does NOT include the word BUT
- Keeps the focus on your actions and not the other person's response
- Includes an offer of reparation or restitution that fits the situation
- Does not overdo
- Does not get caught up in who's to blame or who started it
- Requires that you do your best to avoid a repeat performance
- Should not serve to silence
- Shouldn't be offered to make you feel better if it risks making the hurt party feel worse
- Does not ask the hurt party to do anything, not even to forgive.
- The critical piece often involves the person receiving the apology:

If you are receiving the apology, you do not have to accept the apology, but you should thank the person for the apology. For example, after a person has apologized, you would say, "Thank you for the apology." There is no need to say "I do not accept it"—that is equivalent to getting even.

Step 6: The Other Participant Gets to Go

Follow steps 4 and 5 for the other participant.

Step 7: Conclude the Conversation

Once both participants have expressed their feelings and have apologized, ask if there is anything else either of them needs to express.

Thank them both for being brave and courageous in expressing their feelings. Lay out some ground rules for moving forward.

Ground rules:

- This conversation was sensitive and is not to be shared beyond this circle of trust.
- We do not want to tell our friends and/or colleagues, because it could break the new foundation of respect we just created.

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- Now that we know the other person's feelings, can we commit to adjusting how we speak or treat each other?

Step 8: Follow up:

- Meet with each participant privately and ask them if they feel better.
- Recap shared commitments and sent to both parties via email. This can be short and sweet, but also serves to document that the restorative conversation occurred, and the behaviors both parties agreed to.
- Create a follow-up process to check in with each participant to make sure the agreed-upon process has stayed true. Checking back in is key!
- If performance issues were of concern, follow up with the manager separately to align on next steps.