

Safety Recovery – Approaching Difficult Conversations

Effective listening

An important component of being able to have difficult conversations is knowing how to listen effectively. There are 5 Key elements to effective listening:

1. **Paying attention** – give the speaker your undivided attention.
2. **Show that you are listening** – use your body language and gestures to help demonstrate this.
3. **Provide feedback** – clarify and summarise to ensure that you correctly understood what is being said.
4. **Defer Judgement** – don't interrupt, don't promise anything you won't be able to deliver and wait until you have all the facts in your possession to make a decision.
5. **Respond appropriately** – be open and honest. If you are unable to fix the issue, be honest about that and then explore other avenues to help address the issues i.e. complaint form.

Approaching Conversations

Positive and effective conversations are the foundation of good relationships between staff and prisoners. Sometimes you will have to have conversations in which you need to find out information that the individual may be reluctant to disclose.

These top tips may help you get the best out of these conversations:

1. **Start the conversation with a gentle open question** – For example 'how are you doing today' before asking about your particular concerns.
2. **Sit down to talk in a supportive, non- judgemental way** – when discussing your concerns or a particular issue.
3. **Stay calm and do more listening than talking** – try to assure the individual that you can be trusted to lend an ear and give support without passing judgement.
4. **Think about your conversation and what you need to get out of it in advance of having the conversation** – this will help you guide the conversation so that it stays on track which can save you time in the long run.
5. **Asking 'why'** – someone has done something is just as important as finding out whether they did do something.

Non-verbal communication

Remember always have:

- ✓ Good eye contact.
- ✓ Open hand gestures.
- ✓ Positive or neutral facial expressions.
- ✓ Open and relaxed posture.

Refusing to engage?

When this happens, it is important to still try and engage with them. Draw on their protective factors as this can help.

Find out what their interests are of things they like to talk about. Try to use these to make a connection with the individual. Such conversations may open the door for further interactions with them.