

# The Difficult Conversation

Tiffany Jackson and Timi Tullis  
AASB Staff

# We will learn to....

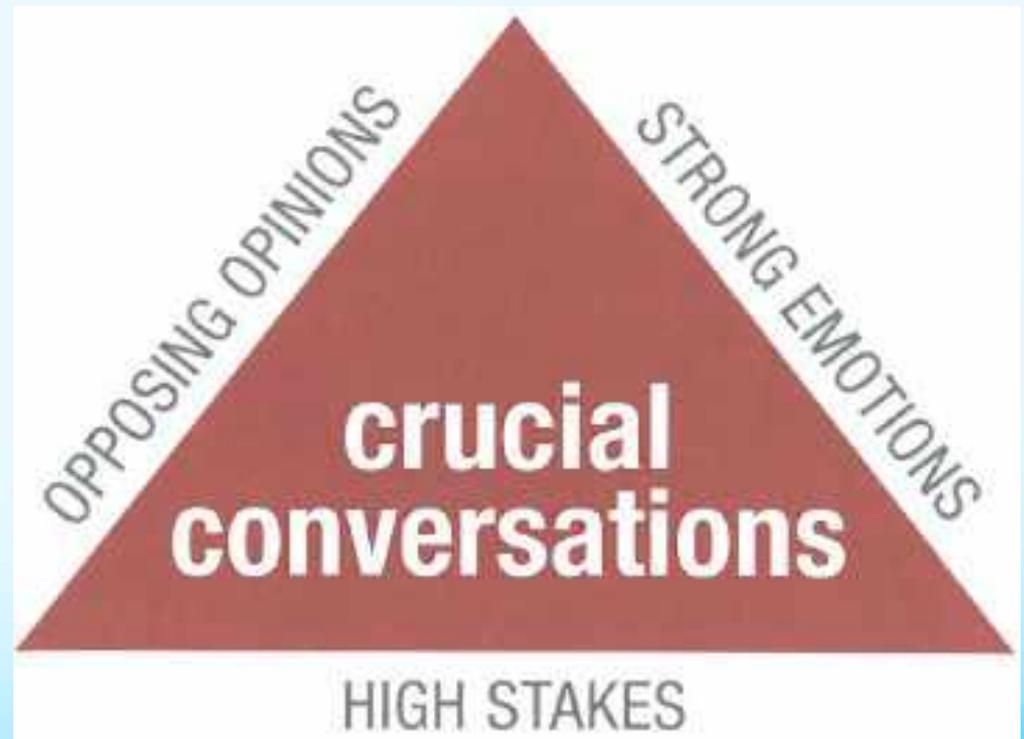
- Spot the conversations that are keeping you from what you want
- Stay focused on what you really want
- Stay in dialogue when you're angry, scared, or hurt
- Speak persuasively, not abrasively
- Notice when safety is at risk
- Make it safe to talk about almost anything
- Create a mutual purpose
- Listen when others blow up or clam up
- Turn crucial conversations into actions and results

# Difficult Conversations Steps

- 1. Get **UNSTUCK**
- 2. Start with **HEART**
- 3. **MASTER** my Stories
- 4. **STATE** my Path
- 5. **LEARN** to Look
- 6. Make it **SAFE pt.1**
- 7. Make it **SAFE pt. 2**
- 8. **EXPLORE** Others' Paths
- 9. Move to **ACTION**

# What is a Difficult Conversation?

- A difficult conversation is a discussion between two or more people where:
  - Stakes are high
  - Opinions vary
  - Emotions run strong



# Ways of Handling Difficult Conversations

1. Avoid them
2. Face them and handle them poorly
3. Face them and handle them well

When we avoid difficult conversations we trade short term discomfort for long term dysfunction.

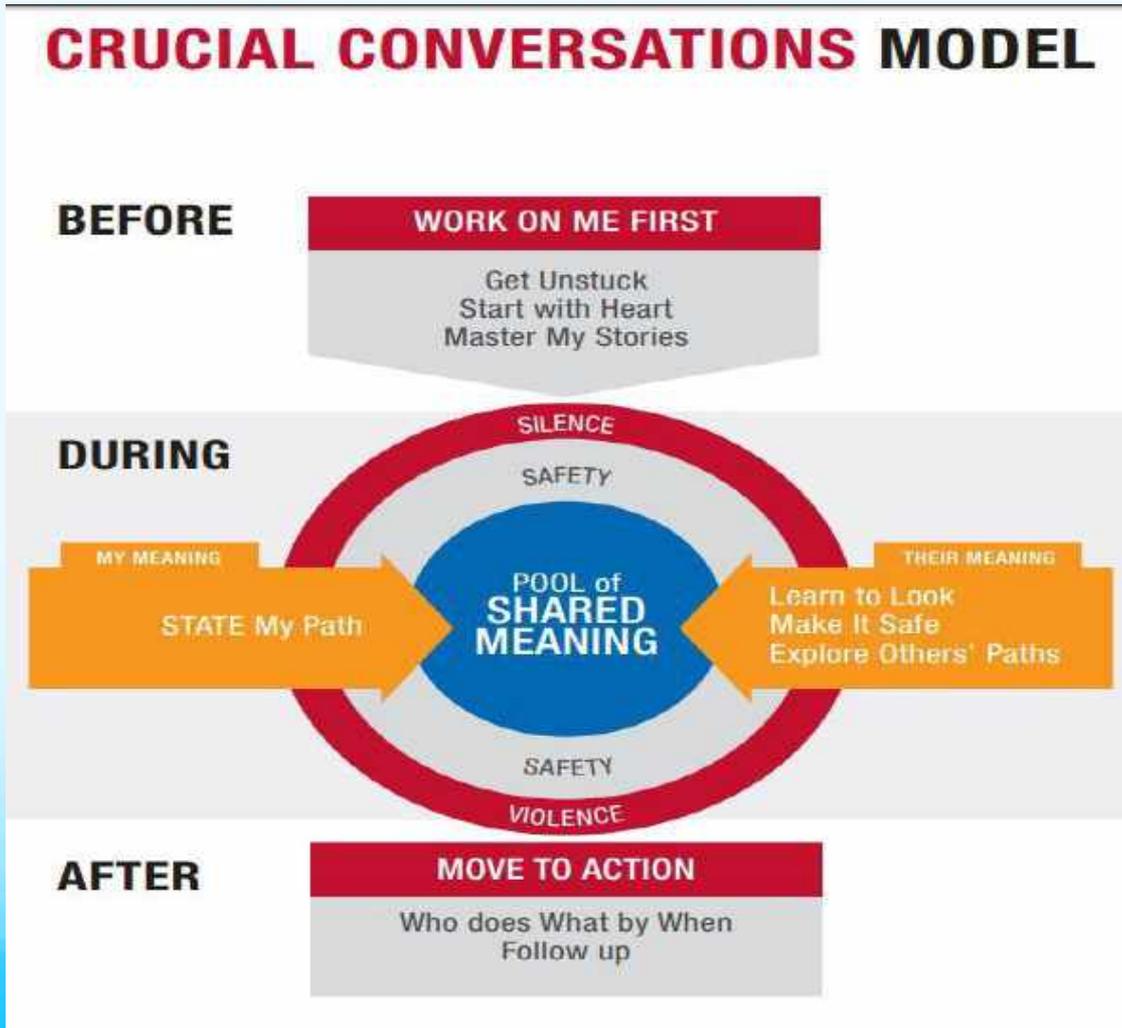


someecards  
user card

# Mastering Crucial Conversations

- “Dialogue” is the free flow of meaning between two or more people.
- Filling the Pool of Shared Meaning
- Better Choices

# Crucial Conversation Model



# Reflection

- 1. On a piece of paper, write a summary of a difficult conversation you have **experienced as a board member with another adult**. It could be with another board member, a parent, a principal, or the superintendent in your school district.
- 2. How did you **plan** for this difficult conversation?
- 3. What made the conversation **so difficult**?
- 4. What was **the outcome** of the conversation?

# Step 1; Get UNSTUCK

How to spot the conversations that are keeping you from what you want

- What conversations—especially those with other adults in your building—are you not holding or not holding well?
- Which type of conversation do you need to have?
  - C**ontent – Discussing the issue itself
  - P**attern – Discussing the problem that the issue keeps recurring
  - R**elationship – Discussing the fact that the issue is affecting your relationship

# Step 2: Start with the Heart

How to stay focused on what you really want

- • What results do I really want-

- For myself?
- For others?
- For the relationship?
- For the school district?



- How would I behave if I really wanted these results?
- Am I making a Sucker's Choice?

# Step 3: Master My Story

How to stay in the dialogue when you're angry, scared or hurt

- Am I telling a Victim, Villain, or Helpless Story?
- What evidence do I have to support this story?
- What am I pretending not to notice about my role in the situation?
- What should I do right now to move toward what I really want?
- What story might the other person be telling about me?
- Why would a reasonable, rational, and decent person do what they are doing?

# Step 4: State My Plan

How to speak persuasively, not abrasively

● **S**hare your facts

● **T**ell your story

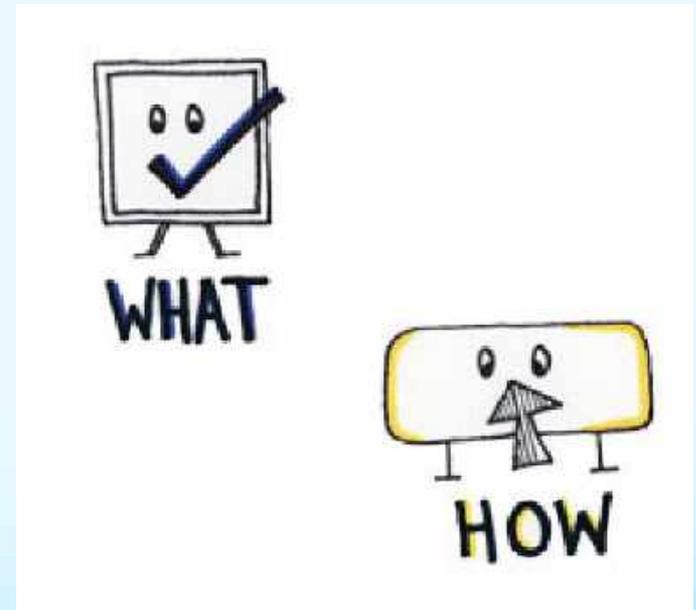
● **A**sk for other's paths

● **T**alk tentatively

● **E**ncourage testing

**What Skills**

**How Skills**



# Step 5: Learn to Look

How to notice when safety is at risk

- Spot the warning signs that indicate safety is at risk
- Notice various forms of silence and aggression
- Step out of a conversation and notice how to make it work



# Step 6: Make it Safe; Part 1

How to make it safe to talk about almost anything

	<b>Clear Problem</b>	Misunderstanding
Mutual Respect	Apologize	Contrast
Mutual Purpose	Create Mutual Purpose	Contrast

# Step 7: Make it Safe Part 2

How to create mutual purpose

- Commit to seek mutual purpose
- Recognize the purpose behind the strategy
- Invent a mutual purpose
- Brainstorm new strategies



# Step 8: Explore Others' Paths

- Ask to get things rolling
- Mirror to confirm feelings
- Paraphrase to acknowledge the story
- Prime when you're getting nowhere



# Step 9: Move to ACTION

How to turn crucial conversation into action and results

**Who**

does **What**

by **When**

and how we will **Follow up**



association of  
**ALASKA**  
school boards

# Putting It All Together

- **Learn to Look**

- Are we playing games or are we in dialogue?
- Are we falling into silence or aggression?

- **Make It Safe**

- When you notice the conversation has moved out of dialogue, do something to make it safe

# Conversation Planner

- Use the worksheet to plan your next difficult conversation