

Fact sheet

Communicating so people feel safe to speak up

It can be tricky to not react negatively to bad news, disagreement or criticism. We can automatically want to express our feelings with an angry outburst. We might want to argue our point and tell the other person why they are wrong. You don't have to ignore how you feel, but you don't want your feelings to run the conversation either. The purpose of the communication should be to understand what the issue is, understand the impact and work out what the next steps are. Remind yourself of the potential to learn something new. Maintaining a respectful relationship is paramount.

Listen to what they have to say:

Express appreciation

Thank them for letting you know and acknowledge the effort made to tell you.

"Thanks for letting me know, I appreciate getting this news so quickly..."

Clarify

Check you have understood their main points correctly and allow for the other person to clarify.

"Can I just check I've understood correctly?" Or "I may have missed something, what I heard was..." (repeat the key points from the discussion) "did I get that right?" or "Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?"

Understand what's going on – ask more, tell less

Use open ended questions to explore the impacts of the issues and how to move forward now it has been raised.

By asking more and telling less there is an opportunity for extra learning and more information to come forward.

"How can I help?"

"What's the most urgent issue here?"

"What are your key concerns?" (Listen first, then add any others concerns you have) "I'm also thinking that we should consider..."

"How have you or others dealt with this before?... How did that go?"

"What do you think needs to happen?"

"What do others feel?"

"What do you think went wrong?"

Give your honest feedback

Give honest feedback and information as needed and in an appropriate manner. It's okay to not be perfect and to disagree.

"This really took me by surprise, so I had to take a moment to think clearly"

"I'm going to have to disagree on this one"

"I see your concerns for the project. I believe we can manage them, but let's keep checking in"

"Thanks for letting me know how you feel about this. Sorry it's had such a negative impact, I really didn't know. Now I hope we can work out what to do together"

"After listening to what's happened, I'm going to have to start a formal process to find out what's gone wrong so we can learn from it."

