

Communicating in a climate of stress

There is a lot going on in the world. Cost of living stresses, combative news and social media, fall-out from covid, climate crisis, war and global uncertainty. These tensions echo through our personal lives, placing pressure on relationships, straining supports and undermining resources. With so much to process and respond to, we can find ourselves facing more challenging conversations than usual.

Getting started

First, how are you? Are you sleeping, eating well, taking time to unplug and unwind? It is more critical now than ever to look after our health and stress levels, both to continue to be there for others and strengthen our immune systems.

Refrain

The higher the risk or anxiety involved, the more likely we will revert to a "fix it" mindset where we:

- Inform, warn, or confront
- Rely on facts and logic to persuade
- Try to problem solve for the person.

The risk is that when we push for a course of action, the other person is more likely to defend the case against it.

Connect

While we know how important it is to stay calm and present, it can be one of the first things to lose when there is so much going on. We can ground both of us by connecting:

- Slow down
- Ask for their perspective
- Listen
- Reflect and check your understanding
- Affirm strengths, values and shared goals.

Ask-offer-ask

We are more likely to find practical solutions when we take a collaborative approach that actively involves the other person in problem solving together. A useful guide is to:

- **Ask** for their understanding (e.g. of the situation or the purpose of a policy)
- Ask permission to **offer** information (e.g. the rationale for a specific approach) or suggestions (e.g. practical options that may fit their circumstances)
- **Ask** for their thoughts (e.g. what they made of your ideas) or suggestions (e.g. possible next steps that address their concerns).

Be safe, be kind

These are very stressful times. Look after yourselves and each other.



Guiding the conversation: what might this look like in practice?

Connect

- *How are you feeling? How are you going?*
- *What are your thoughts about...?*
- *What are your concerns about...?*

Reflect

- *You're feeling... or This feels...*
- *You're not sure about...*
- *You're wondering...*
- *You're hoping... or You would prefer...*
- *It's important that...*
- *You feel able to...*
- *You're willing to...*

Affirm

- *I appreciate your... (e.g. honesty, courage, concern for others, other strength).*
- *Your (e.g. family, health, relationships, commitment to others, other value) is important to you.*
- *I can see we both want... (e.g. what's best for others, safety, solutions that are realistic).*

Ask

- *What have you heard about...?*
- *What do you know about... (e.g. the policy/requirement/area of disagreement)*
- *What's your understanding of why you're being asked to...?*

Offer

- *Would it be OK if I explained a bit more about the reason for...?*
- *If it's OK, I'd like to clarify a couple of things...*
- *I can provide some more information on... Would this be a good place to start?*
- *These some ideas that have worked for others in a similar situation. Would it be helpful to hear about them and see what you think?*

Ask

- *How does that fit with your understanding?*
- *Of the different things we have covered, what's your priority?*
- *What would be helpful to focus on first?*
- *What do you need from me in order to work on this?*
- *What would help us to work together on finding a good solution here?*

Affirm

- *This is a really difficult situation to be in, I appreciate your openness to discuss this with me.*

