

Crucial Conversations – Quick Reference Sheet

What Makes a Conversation Crucial?

- Stakes are high
- Emotions are strong
- Opinions differ

Start With the Heart

Ask yourself:

- What do I really want for me?
- What do I want for them?
- What do I want for our relationship?

Create Safety

- Begin gently
- Affirm the relationship
- Avoid blame
- Pause to calm when emotions rise

Share Facts Before Feelings

Use observable behavior first.

Example:

✓ “When the meeting ended early and you walked out quickly...”
then feelings: “I felt dismissed.”

Tell Your Story with Humility

Share interpretations as possibilities, not facts.

“I may be wrong, but here’s how I understood it...”

Listen to Understand

- Reflect what you hear
- Validate feelings
- Ask curious questions
- Avoid interrupting

Move Toward Shared Meaning

Ask:

- What matters most to each of us?
- Where do our goals overlap?
- What would a win–win look like?

Make Clear Agreements

Clarify next steps:

- What will we each do?

- What changes will we try?
- How will we follow up?

Helpful vs. Unhelpful Language

Unhelpful	Helpful
"You always..."	"When ____ happened, I felt ____."
"Whatever."	"Can we walk through this together?"
"Calm down."	"Help me understand your perspective."
"This is your fault."	"Can we talk about what part each of us played?"
"You never listen."	"I want to feel heard. Can we slow down for a moment?"
"I'm done talking about this."	"Can we pause and return to this when we're both calm?"
"You don't care."	"I'm needing some reassurance—can we talk about this?"
"Why are you so sensitive?"	"I didn't realize this affected you so deeply—can you share more?"