



Honest conversations: a checklist

Many people dread the conflict associated with ‘difficult’ conversations. Use these tips from **Nickii Messer** as a reminder to stay focused on *honest* conversations, listening to understand and seeking resolution.

For more guidance, see [Call them honest: conversations to empower, understand and resolve](#)

1. Build on a foundation of trust

- Consistently demonstrate fairness, transparency and shared values.
- Trust goes both ways – ensure that your leadership approach is rooted in integrity.

2. Reframe the conversation in your mind

- Avoid labelling the conversation as ‘difficult’. Instead, view it as an opportunity for growth and understanding.
- Remember: it's about improving outcomes for children and young people, and helping your team perform at their best.

3. Prepare and give notice

- Let the person know in advance what the conversation will cover.
- Avoid surprising them; provide context and clarity to help them prepare.

4. Listen to understand, not just to respond

- Slow down, listen, and focus entirely on what the other person is saying.
- Allow space for silence; some people need time to gather their thoughts.
- Be open to discovering information you might not have considered.

5. Collaborate on a solution

- Approach the conversation with a ‘win-win’ mindset.
- Frame the discussion around, ‘What can we do to resolve this together?’
- Stay focused on the ultimate purpose: delivering the highest quality of service for the pupils.

6. Believe in yourself

- Be confident. If someone else can do it, so can you!
- Don't put off honest conversations: avoidance just means problems get bigger.
- Stay professional, focus on solutions, and trust that you're the right person for the job.