Theresa Babbs-Durrant

MENTAL HEALTH COACH & THERAPIST

The Difficult Conversation Planner

A step-by-step guide for the conversation you've been putting off

Before you begin

This planner is for the kind of conversation that feels hard but is safe to have: a recurring disagreement, something you've been holding back, a need that hasn't been voiced. It is a reflective and practical tool, not relationship or couples therapy, and it can't predict how anyone will respond.

This resource is for personal reflection and general information only. It is not a diagnostic tool, a clinical assessment or a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment, and it cannot tell you whether you have a mental health condition. Your answers stay with you. They are not collected or reviewed by me. This resource is for adults (18+).

Please read first: is this the right tool?

If you feel afraid of how someone might react, or there is a history of control, threats, intimidation or violence, a conversation like this may not be safe or helpful. Please speak to a specialist service first (see the support box at the end) and ***put your safety before the conversation***.

Step 1: The conversation

The conversation I've been putting off, and with whom:

Why it matters to me:

What might happen if I keep avoiding it:

Step 2: What's underneath

The topic on the surface is rarely the whole story. Underneath there is often a feeling and a need.

Feelings that might be underneath (tick any that fit):

- ☐ Hurt
- ☐ Lonely
- ☐ Unseen
- ☐ Anxious
- ☐ Overwhelmed
- ☐ Disappointed
- ☐ Embarrassed
- ☐ Worried about losing the connection

Needs that might be underneath (tick any that fit):

- ☐ To be heard
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Respect
- ☐ Fairness
- ☐ Closeness
- ☐ Space
- ☐ Reassurance
- ☐ Clarity

The feeling beneath my frustration is...

What I most need is...

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Step 3: Choosing the moment

Hard conversations tend to go better when neither person is tired, hungry, rushed or mid-argument. A short heads-up can help:

- *“There's something I'd like to talk about when we both have time. Nothing alarming. Would Sunday afternoon suit?”*

When and where feels right:

Step 4: Opening lines

A simple structure is: “*When ____ happens, I feel ____, because ____. What I need is ____.*”

Notice how it describes your experience rather than the other person's character.

Try to avoid:

- “You always” and “you never”
- Guessing what the other person thinks or feels
- Bringing up everything at once

My opening, in my own words:

Step 5: Listening and pausing

One thing I want to understand about their experience:

If I feel overwhelmed, I can say:

- *“I need a short break so I can listen properly. Can we pick this up at ____?”*

Step 6: If it goes off track

Most conversations wobble. What matters is being able to come back. Repair is often short, imperfect and brave. Choose one or two that feel honest to you:

- “I got defensive, and I'm sorry.”
- “Can I try that again?”
- “I don't want to win this. I want us to understand each other.”
- “Let's take a breath and start again.”

Step 7: After the conversation

A good outcome may simply be that you said it, or that you were heard, rather than that everything was solved. Plan something kind for afterwards.

A good-enough outcome for me would be...

What I'll do afterwards to look after myself:

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If you need support now

- In an emergency, or if you feel you can't keep yourself safe: call 999.
- Samaritans (free, 24 hours): 116 123.
- Shout (free text support, 24 hours): text SHOUT to 85258.
- Northern Ireland: Lifeline (free, 24 hours): 0808 808 8000.
- If a relationship feels unsafe: National Domestic Abuse Helpline (England) 0808 2000 247, 24 hours. Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Northern Ireland) 0808 802 1414, 24 hours. In Scotland and Wales, please search for your national domestic abuse helpline.

Worried about your health? Speak to your GP. Out of hours, call NHS 111 in England, Scotland or Wales. In Northern Ireland, your GP surgery will direct you to the out-of-hours service.

If you'd like to talk it through

If something here resonated and you'd like help making sense of it, I'd be glad to hear from you. You are welcome to book a free, no-obligation consultation. There's no pressure to, and nothing in this resource needs to be shared with me.

Providing Counselling Services
in Windermere, and online
across the UK

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