



# Having a Constructive Conversation

## Guidance

# Guidance – Having a Constructive Conversation

## Introduction

The [Considering Adjustments](#) page sets out a process to support managers and colleagues to discuss, explore, identify and implement adjustments in the workplace. Constructive and open dialogue is essential to this process to ensure colleague experiences and/or needs are understood and that adjustments are considered openly and fairly. This guidance note provides additional guidance to support managers and colleagues through this process.

## Preparing for a Constructive Conversation

Aligning to the 'Prepare' section of the [Considering Adjustments](#) guidance, managers should prepare in advance by thinking about what needs to be covered during the discussion as well as any questions that they plan to ask. This can help to ensure that the meeting is as productive as possible. Guidance notes such as this one, as well as others on the [Support for Disabled and Neurodivergent Colleagues Portal](#), can be read in advance (and referred to during meetings) as required. Colleagues may also choose to use/refer to the optional [Reasonable Adjustments Passport Form](#).

An suitable venue (including virtual, if appropriate) should be used, providing a quiet and confidential area to hold the conversation.

## Stages of a Conversation

The structure of a conversation can seem obvious at first, however the success of the conversation can be influenced by a wide range of factors, including the skill and awareness of those involved.

One simple but helpful model is highlighted below. This shows an effective conversation cycle across 4 distinct stages:



More detail on each stage is provided below:

### Inform

Provide information or an explanation, so that the individual knows what the discussion is focussing on, or what is coming next etc.

*Example – “I’d like to discuss which adjustments may support you at work” or “I’d like to understand more about the barriers you face/may face in the workplace”.*

### Invite

Ask a question relevant to the information given at the inform stage in order to seek input from the individual and to bring them into the conversation.

*Example – “Do you have any particular adjustments in mind that you think or know would be effective?”*

### Listen

Actively listen, to the individual’s response. Utilising non-verbal communication while the speaker is talking, such as maintaining eye contact and nodding may help the speaker feel more at ease and confident that what they are saying is being heard and understood. A degree of interruption can be appropriate here in order to ensure a point is understood, although interruptions should not be to an extent that they detract from the individual being given the chance to respond.

## Acknowledge

Having listened to what the employee had to say on a given point of discussion, managers should demonstrate that they have listened and understood by acknowledging what was said. Language such as “Ok, I understand” or “I appreciate that” alongside a degree of paraphrasing/feeding back can help to acknowledge what was said.

Example – “From what you have said, I understand that the initially proposed working pattern would pose particular challenges for you and that you would like to explore options to flex your working hours. With that in mind, I’d like to explore options around this”  
[Conversation has moved back to the Inform stage]

The above cycle repeats until the conversation is concluded. Whilst a simple model, it is a useful point of reference and it should be noted that it can be easy to stray from this pattern by, for example, repeating the ‘Inform’ stage alone and not offering the opportunity for others to input, or by inviting the views of others only to then skip the ‘Listen’ and/or ‘Acknowledge’ steps and making others feel like their input is not welcome or valued.

## Other Considerations

Knowing the stages of a conversation is helpful, however the finer detail of what is said within each stage is key to ensuring the conversation is constructive.

When it comes to asking questions, it is generally advisable to use open questioning throughout (i.e. questions which start with ‘How?’, ‘What?’, ‘Where?’, ‘Who?’ and ‘When?’) as these support two-way dialogue. Questions starting with ‘Why?’ should be used carefully and only if necessary (e.g. for clarifying points of detail or to foster greater understanding in order to support further) as these can in some circumstances restrict the conversation.

Caution should also be exercised in order to avoid lines of questioning which may come across as demanding proof of a disability, or giving the perception of questioning if an adjustment is actually needed.