



# Handling Difficult Conversations



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# Presenters



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# Agenda



What is a difficult conversation?

How do we start a difficult conversation?

Types of difficult conversations in financial aid

Difficult conversations with students

Difficult conversations with staff

Difficult conversations with other departments

Resources



# Difficult Conversations



Every day in our personal and professional lives we face difficult conversations. Budgeting with our spouse or significant other. Family life with children, parents, in-laws, and the decisions that need to be made.

Then, we choose Financial Aid as our career, and much of our professional life is measured by how we handle the difficult conversations at work with our supervisor, a student, the staff we manage, and other departments on campus.

Difficult conversations are a day-to-day in operations as we respond to issues, concerns and communicate across the campus.

I am sure we can all think of a million different examples but today we will address three - students, staff and other departments.

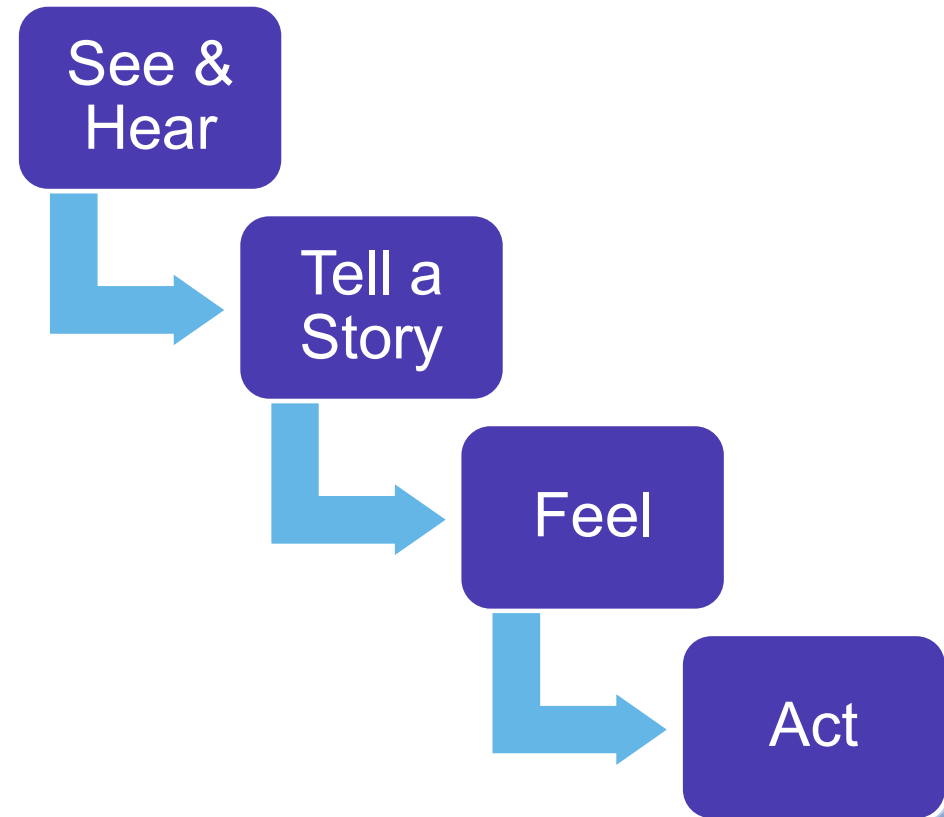
# Crucial Conversations



A crucial conversation has three ingredients:

- High stakes
- Strong emotions
- Opposing opinions

**“Each one of us enters a conversation with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about the topic at hand” –Patterson.**



# Difficult Conversations



Satisfactory  
Academic  
Progress

Professional  
Judgments

Inability to pay

Parent refusal to  
provide  
information

Why am I not Pell  
Eligible?

Why does FA  
keep students  
from staying in  
school?

# Difficult Conversations with Students



- Maintain a dialogue with the student/parent
  - Allow them to express frustrations
  - Let them feel heard
  - Actively listen to what is being said
- State what you agree with
  - Allows the conversation to start on a positive note
- State the facts
  - Do not make it personal



# Satisfactory Academic Progress



Explain why they failed SAP

Explain this is a Federal requirement

Ask if they have any questions

Use plain language

Offer solutions

# Unhappy Parent/Student



Aid has been adjusted or removed



Student or parent calls in upset stating  
no one told them this would happen!



How do we begin the conversation?

# Why am I not Pell eligible?



EFC change from 22-23 to 23-24

Verification changed EFC

I was Pell eligible last year!

How do you start the conversation?

Do you compare FAFSAs?

Has there been a change in the household since FAFSA was filed?

- You changed my FAFSA, and I did not approve that!
- How do you start the conversation?
- Did the family use the IRS DRT? Or did they not transfer their data?
- Has there been a change in the household since their taxes were filed?

# Difficult Conversations with Staff



Timeliness/Work  
Performance

Failing to be a  
member of a  
team

New staff  
struggling to  
learn Financial  
Aid

Teaching your  
staff to have  
difficult  
conversations

Developing your  
future leaders

# Difficult Conversations with Staff



Practice what you preach



Be prepared to stay on topic



Create the right space for conversation



LISTEN (Active Listening)



Practice makes perfect

# Difficult Conversations with Other Departments



FERPA

State the facts

Use plain language

Explain the process

Offer solutions

# Difficult Conversations with Other Departments

Offer training sessions with other departments

Be part of the conversation on the table

- Committees
- Management
- Division meetings

# More Difficult Conversations in 24-25



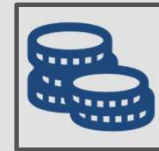
STUDENT AID INDEX  
(SAI)  
HOW WILL IT CHANGE  
PELL ELIGIBILITY?



DELAYING ADMISSIONS  
PROCESS DUE TO LATE  
FAFSA RELEASE



WHY FINANCIAL AID  
PACKAGES MAY BE  
LATER THAN NORMAL  
DUE TO DELAYED  
FAFSA



ASKING LEADERSHIP  
FOR MORE  
SCHOLARSHIP MONEY  
FOR STUDENTS WHO  
WERE PELL ELIGIBLE  
AND ARE INELIGIBLE  
NOW





# QUESTIONS





Thank  
You!