



# FAMILIES TACKLING TOUGH TIMES TOGETHER



**FAMILY**  
YOUNG ADULTS

## We Share Our Feelings Constructively! Open Emotional Expression

In their book “[Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters](#),” Douglas Stone, Bruce Patton, and Sheila Heen (2010) begin by reminding us that we benefit most when we come at each conversation as a **learning** conversation. So often when we are in conflict with others, we think we know what they are thinking and/or about how they will respond. The interesting thing is that individuals on **both** sides of any situation are making those assumptions—so much so that a conversation may not ever occur.

### Having Difficult Conversations

There is no question that difficult conversations often feel uncomfortable or even awkward. However, there are some guidelines that can help move the process forward. One critical guideline is to truly listen; pause your mind while the other person is talking and literally take in what they are saying. Take a break from the blame game.

Stone et al. (2010) do a great job of reminding us that difficult conversations are not just about what is said, but also about the emotions of the people involved. It is not simply the words we use, but also our tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, etc. No one wants to be seen as challenging or as a “problem,” and yet we all need to be seen and heard.

### Video Resources

- [How Miscommunication Happens \(And How to Avoid It\)](#)
- [10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation](#)

### Activities

#### Internal Actions

- Engage in perspective-taking or thinking about how others feel while listening to stories from/about those who have identities different from your own. This exposure could happen through reading, TV, movies, etc. Reflect on how the stories shown in these situations may be different than how you would experience them.

#### External Actions

- Much of the advice about having better conversations focuses on messaging, tone, and presentation style. The most important action may actually be to listen/receive the other person’s message. Active listening requires attention and effort, but it can be critical to meaningful and important conversation.

To learn more about the science behind perspective taking, you may wish to read the below research:

- [The Necessity of Others is the Mother of Invention: Intrinsic and Prosocial Motivations, Perspective Taking, and Creativity.](#)