

## Crucial Conversations:

Tools for talking when the stakes are high in Special Education

### What is a Crucial Conversation?

- Opinions vary
- Stakes are high
- Emotions are strong

## Video Examples of Crucial Conversations

- The Troubled Couple
  - What's going on with these two and why?
- Cross Word
  - Why did the boss respond this way?  
What's keeping him from stepping up to the crucial conversation?

## When conversations move from casual to crucial:

- We are generally on our worst behavior
  - We're designed wrong
  - We're under pressure
  - We're stumped
  - We act in self-defeating ways

## The Power of Dialogue

- Dialogue
  - The free flow of meaning between two or more people
- Successful conversations
  - Free flow of relevant information

## Filling the Pool of Shared Meaning

- Personal Pool of Meaning
  - Our opinions, feelings, theories and experiences about the topic
- Crucial Conversation
  - Opinions differ: Different pools
- Pool of Shared Meaning
  - Add everyone's meaning to the shared pool

## Start with the Heart

- Work on me first
- Start with the heart
  - Focus on what you really want
  - Refuse the Sucker's Choice

## Focus on what you really want

- Refocus your brain
  - What do I want for myself?
  - What do I want for others?
  - What do I want for the relationship?
- Find your bearings
- Take charge of your body

## Common Deviations

- Wanting to win
- Seeking revenge
- Hoping to remain safe

## Refuse the Sucker's Choice

- Two distasteful decisions
- Fight
  - Attack and try to win
- Flight
  - Remain silent and do nothing
- Third choice
  - Respectful and honest

## Refuse the Sucker's Choice

- Clarify what you really want
- Clarify what you really don't want
- Present your brain with a more complex problem

## Video Example: Start with the Heart

- The Apology
  - How does Rick act at first?
  - How does he change this?
  - What had to change in Rick's attitude in order for him to make this change in style and strategy?

## Learn to Look

- We usually focus on ***content*** of discussion
- We are often blind to the ***conditions:***
  - The moment a conversation turns crucial
  - Signs people don't feel safe

## Spot the Crucial Conversation

- Physical signs
- Emotions
- Behavioral signs

## Look for Safety Problems

- When it is safe people feel free to say anything
- When it is unsafe people turn to:
  - **Silence**
  - Or
  - **Violence**

## Silence or Violence

- Silence: withhold information
  - Masking
  - Avoiding
  - Withdrawing
- Violence: convince, control or compel
  - Controlling
  - Labeling
  - Attacking

## Your Style Under Stress

- Watch your own behavior
- Step out of an argument and watch for process
  - What are you doing?
  - What impact is it having?
  - Alter your strategy if necessary
- Your Style Under Stress Test

## Video Examples: Learn to Look

- Graduation
  - Two couples are about to go to a high school graduation.
  - Watch as they talk to each other. Look for the various forms of silence and violence. See how many you can spot.

## Video Examples: Learn to Look

- Graduation with Labels
  - This time, watch to see how many you got right.

## Make It Safe

- Safety Requires
  - **Mutual Purpose**
  - **Mutual Respect**

## Mutual Purpose

- Others perceive that:
  - We are working toward a common outcome
  - We care about their goals, interests, and values
- Signs Mutual Purpose is at Risk
  - Debate, defensiveness, hidden agendas, and accusations

## Mutual Respect

- In order to build safety people must perceive that they are respected
- Signs that Mutual Respect is at risk
  - Defending dignity, strong emotions turn from fear to anger, pouting, name calling, yelling, and making threats

## Step out of the conversation

- When a conversation is unsafe we need to create Mutual Purpose and Mutual Respect
  - Step out of the conversation and
    - Apologize
    - Contrast
    - CRIB

## Apologize and Contrast

- Apologize when appropriate
  - Requires a change of heart
- Contrast to fix misunderstandings
  - “Don’t/Do” statement
  - Addresses others concern that you don’t respect them (don’t)
  - Confirms your respect or clarifies your purpose (do)

## Contrasting

- Is not apologizing
- Provides context and proportion
- Can be used for first aid
- Examples and activities

## CRIB to get Mutual Purpose

- Commit to seek Mutual Purpose
- Recognize the purpose behind the strategy
- Inv<sub>ent</sub> a Mutual Purpose
- Brainstorm new strategies

## Emotions Don't Just Happen

- Others don't make you mad - You make you mad
  - Only you create your emotions
- Once you have created your emotions you have two options:
  - You can act on your emotions OR
  - You can be acted on by your emotions

## When Emotions Enter the Conversation

- The worst at dialogue treat emotions as the only valid response
- The good realize they must stay in control or things will get worse
- The best act on their emotions and think them out

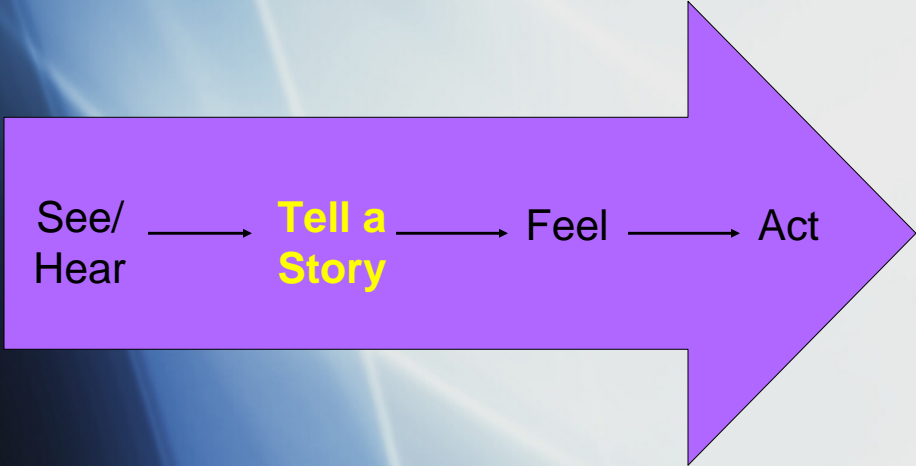
## How Feelings Drive Action



## Stories Create Feelings

- We tell ourselves a story to explain what is going on
- Even if we don't realize it we tell ourselves a story
- Any set of facts can be used to make an infinite number of stories
- If we take control of our stories they won't control us

## Path to Action



See/  
Hear → **Tell a  
Story** → Feel → Act

## Video Example: Make it Safe

- The Rookie
  - Retrace the path - What story did Lisa (the rookie) tell herself?
  - How did Marc create safety?

## Skills for Controlling Stories

- Retrace your path
  - Notice your behavior
  - Get in touch with your feelings
  - Analyze your stories
  - Get back to the facts

## Watch for Clever Stories

- Victim Stories
  - “It’s not my fault.”
- Villain Stories
  - “It’s all your fault.”
- Helpless Stories
  - “There’s nothing else I can do.”

## Why do we tell these stories?

- They match reality
  - Sometimes the stories are accurate
- They get us off the hook
  - Excuse us from responsibility
- Keep us from acknowledging our own sellouts

## Tell the Rest of the Story

- Tell yourself a useful story
- A useful story creates emotions that lead to healthy action such as dialogue
  - Turn victims into actors
  - Turn villains into humans
  - Turn the helpless into the able

## Video Example: Tell the rest of the story

- What's Wrong with Them?
  - What happens as they tell an ugly story?
  - What happens when they tell themselves the rest of the story?

## Sharing Risky Meaning and Maintaining Safety

- Adding delicate, unattractive or controversial opinions to the pool is risky
- Maintain safety with:
  - Confidence
  - Humility
  - Skill

## STATE My Path

- Share your facts
- Tell your story
- Ask for others' paths
- Talk tentatively
- Encourage Testing

## Share your facts

- Facts are the least controversial
- Facts are the most persuasive
- Facts are the least insulting
- Begin your path with the facts

## Tell your story

- Risky, but important
- It takes confidence
- Don't pile it on
- Look for safety problems
- Use contrasting

## Ask for others' paths

- Ask others to share their views
  - The goal is to learn rather than be right
  - The goal is to make the best decision rather than get your way
- Be willing to abandon or reshape your story as more information is added

## Talk tentatively

- Tell your story as a story rather than disguising it as a fact
  - Blend of confidence and humility
  - Trying to add to the pool not force
  - Accurately portrays uncertain view
  - Reduces defensiveness
- Tentative is not wimpy

## Encourage testing

- Make it safe
- Invite opposing views
- Mean it
- Play devils advocate

## Video Example: STATE my Path

- Quit Playing Hero!
  - Connie thinks that her husband Bruce is undercutting her with the children.
  - First she tells an ugly story, and then she tries to STATE her path.
    - What elements does she use?
    - How does this affect the conversation?

## Explore Others' Paths

- Get ready to listen
  - Be sincere
  - Be curious
  - Stay curious
  - Be patient

## AMMP

- Ask to get things rolling
- Mirror to confirm feelings
- Paraphrase to acknowledge the story
- Prime when you're getting nowhere

## Remember your ABC's

- Agree
  - Agree when you do
- Build
  - If others leave something out, agree where you do, then build
- Compare
  - When you do differ significantly compare your views

## Video Example: Explore Others' Paths

- The Car
  - What skills does Carol use?
  - Do they work?
  - What was accomplished by exploring Sam's Path?

## Move to Action

- Dialogue is not decision making
  - Riskiest times in crucial conversations
    - Beginning: creating safety
    - End: Clarifying conclusions & decisions
- Two potential areas of concern:
  - How will decisions be made?
  - Are we ever going to decide?

## The Four Methods of Decision Making

- **Command:** Decisions are made without involving others
- **Consult:** Input is gathered from the group and a subset decides
- **Vote:** An agreed-upon percentage swings the decision
- **Consensus:** Everyone comes to an agreement & supports the final decision

## How to Choose

- Who cares?
- Who knows?
- Who must agree?
- How many people is it worth involving?

## Video Example: Clarifying up Front

- The Decision
  - Carl is about to consult with others in order to make an important decision.
  - How does he clarify the process?
  - Why is this clarification important?