Avanti | Academy

AVANTI ACADEMY IN PRACTICE

The Conversation You're Putting Off

Difficult conversations in practice

Workbook

Dr Jonathan Huish & Dr Amanda Milliner

© Avanti Change Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.

How to use this workbook

Each part of The Conversation You're Putting Off includes a short Try it activity. When the narration invites you to pause, turn to the matching sheet here and take ten minutes or so to work through it for your own role. There are no right answers. The point is to leave with something you will actually do. Keep your completed sheets: they make a useful record for supervision, appraisal or your personal development plan.

Part 1 · Why We Avoid Them, and What It Costs

Cost of silence audit

Choose one conversation you have been putting off. Write it in a sentence, note how long it has waited, list everyone paying for the delay now and if it waits, then choose a date to have it and tell one person you trust.

The conversation I am avoiding, in one sentence:
How long it has waited, and what has happened since:
Who is paying now, and how:
What it will cost if it waits another month:
The date I will have it, and who I will tell:

To reflect on: *Which conversation have you been meaning to have for the longest, and who has been quietly paying for the delay?*

One page conversation plan

Choose a conversation you are preparing for. Write your purpose, the facts you could both recognise, what is at stake for each of you, and your first sentence. Then say the opening aloud once and adjust it until it sounds like you.

My purpose, leaving room for their view:
What I saw and heard, without judgement words:
What I am feeling, and what they may be feeling:
What feels at stake for me, and for them:
My first sentence:

To reflect on: *In your last difficult conversation, how did your first sentence shape what followed?*

One technique, one conversation

Choose an ordinary conversation this week and one technique to practise: mirroring, labelling, an open question or a summary. Plan when you will use it, then review what the other person did next and what you would try in a harder conversation.

The conversation I will practise in:
The technique I will use, in my own words:
The urge I expect to feel, and how I will wait it out:
What the other person did next:
What I will try in a harder conversation:

To reflect on: *When someone is angry with you or your service, what do you usually say first, and how does it land?*

Feedback in Situation, Behaviour, Impact

Choose one piece of feedback you need to give, difficult or positive. Write the situation, the behaviour and the impact in plain words, add one open question, and plan to give it within a day or two of what you saw.

The situation, a specific moment:
The behaviour, as I saw or heard it:
The impact, on the work, colleagues or residents:
My open question, and my and what else:
When and where I will give it:

To reflect on: *Think of feedback you have softened recently. What did the other person actually hear, and what changed afterwards?*

Mapping a disagreement

Choose a disagreement you are part of, or one in your team that is starting to harden. Place it, check the story you are telling about the other person, choose one cooperative first move and name who could help.

Where it is now: still debating the issue, or taking sides?
What I am assuming about their motives:
Another explanation for what they did:
My first cooperative move, and when I will make it:
Who could help, and when I would involve them:

To reflect on: *Think of a conflict that grew. At what point could a light, early conversation have changed its course?*

My practice plan

Choose one real conversation you need to have. Write who it is with and why it matters now, your opening sentence, how you will listen first and handle strong feelings, and how you will confirm, check back and repair. Set a date.

The conversation, who it is with, and the date:
My opening sentence, including my own part:
How I will listen first, and stay steady:
What I will confirm in writing afterwards:
When I will check back, and what repair might be needed:

To reflect on: *Think of the last time your team or organisation got something wrong. Who was told, how soon, and in what words?*

© Avanti Change Ltd 2026. For the personal use of the participant. Composite examples in this programme are invented and do not describe any real person or organisation.