

Week 1: Difficult Conversations

October is Safe Work Month here in Australia. So, over the next four weeks, we will be discussing Orange Sky's most commonly experienced hazards while on shift and will give you practical tips that you can share with your team in order to help stay safe on shift.

At OS, we're all about conversations; unfortunately, from time to time, you may find yourself having a difficult conversation with a friend or even another volunteer. Difficult conversations are our number one people-related hazard and, if not managed well, can have a negative impact on all parties involved. To help avoid difficult conversations, remember OS's Boundary Box and avoid discussing topics that people often have very strong beliefs about (think religion and politics). Also, avoid physical contact, giving money to friends, or forming a relationship with them outside of OS shifts.

However, difficult conversations can occur for other reasons also, many of which are out of our control. If you find yourself engaged in a difficult conversation, use these steps to remain calm and in control:

1. Remain relaxed with a neutral body posture to convey that you are available and approachable and to avoid appearing defensive or aggressive.
2. Take some deep breaths to help remain calm and moderate your breathing.
3. Display empathy & listen. Listening doesn't mean you agree with them; however, try to look at the issue from their perspective.
4. Speak in a confident tone, not loud, rude or aggressive but confident (not timid).
5. Remain situationally aware of what is going on around you, and if things aren't going to plan, take a break and excuse yourself from the situation or use the Safe Word "Daphne" or ask a fellow volunteer to help you as they may not be aware you are having a difficult conversation.
6. Most importantly, look after yourself, remain safe and do not become isolated from your team. If the conversation begins to escalate into a verbal altercation, use the safe word and seek assistance from a team member immediately.

There are many ways to engage in a difficult conversation, these are just several suggestions that can assist you to navigate a difficult conversation positively in the future.

This week, take some time to talk about difficult conversations with your team and discuss ways you can avoid them, de-escalate them or resolve them positively. Also, be sure to check out our other safety resources located here in the Resource Hub for useful guides to help you navigate challenging situations you may encounter while on shift.