



Crucial Conversations.
FOR MASTERING DIALOGUE



UNAFRAID

**HOW TO SPEAK UP ABOUT
THINGS THAT MATTER**

HAVE YOU FELT MORE AFRAID TO SPEAK YOUR MIND LATELY? YOU'RE NOT ALONE.



A Crucial Learning survey of more than 1,300 people found that an incredible 9 out of 10 respondents have felt emotionally or physically unsafe to speak their mind more than once in the past 18 months.

OF OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS:

39%

Reported feeling unsafe either every day or every week.

7%

Report that they are just as confident as ever in social situations.

The topics people have felt the most nervous, unsafe, or reluctant to speak their mind on are likely recognizable to many of us:

74%

Political or social issues

70%

COVID-19 issues

53%

Racism, discrimination, and bias

47%

Conspiracy theories or fake news



Here are just some of the difficult experiences people are having:

“

I am unvaccinated. I was told that I am uncaring about others because of that; it was a 'no brainer' to be vaccinated because the other person cared about others, implying that I don't care. This is a person I have been best friends with for 40+ years. It is a real strain on the relationship, and we have just created distance between us. It's painful and I miss her.

“

I have avoided any and all conversations about politics, race, discrimination, bias, conspiracy theories, COVID, etc., because of the current cancel culture. People are so overwrought and emotional these days and cannot accept that there are and can be opposing viewpoints. I don't want to risk offending someone or being misunderstood. Furthermore, if I were to say something that didn't align with my employer's philosophy, I would lose my job. I've seen it happen and it's just not worth the risk. It's easier to keep my head down and my mouth shut.

“

My mother has four times since COVID surprised the family with the news that she's rented an Airbnb for us. We are not comfortable having people from several households staying together indoors because my dad has cancer and is supposed to follow guidelines for unvaccinated people. My elderly parents are unwilling or unable to discuss this in a respectful manner. When family don't agree with what she wants, Mom launches into aggressive debate and calls everyone selfish.

“

I have a coworker who speaks very disrespectfully of the political party I belong to and makes her statements as if everyone else surely agrees with her because they would be stupid if they didn't. It's very difficult for me to say anything because my workplace is very entrenched in the same ideology, so it doesn't feel safe to disagree with the party line. I don't want to have disagreements with coworkers and feel overpowered in these instances.

Coping Behaviors

Instead of voicing our opinions or concerns, we are resorting to a host of unhealthy behaviors that are crippling constructive dialogue and driving viewpoints farther apart.

These behaviors include:

65%

Staying silent but
feeling inauthentic

39%

Ruminating about all the
things they'd say if they had
the courage

47%

Avoiding people

19%

Faking agreement

42%

Silently fuming and stewing

14%

Severing relationships

DO ANY OF THESE BEHAVIORS FEEL FAMILIAR TO YOU?

Yet the truth is, we've always struggled to master Crucial Conversations. It's also true that today's topics are so divisive and difficult that they reveal, more than ever before, our style when under stress and intensify our fears.



Telling Ourselves Stories

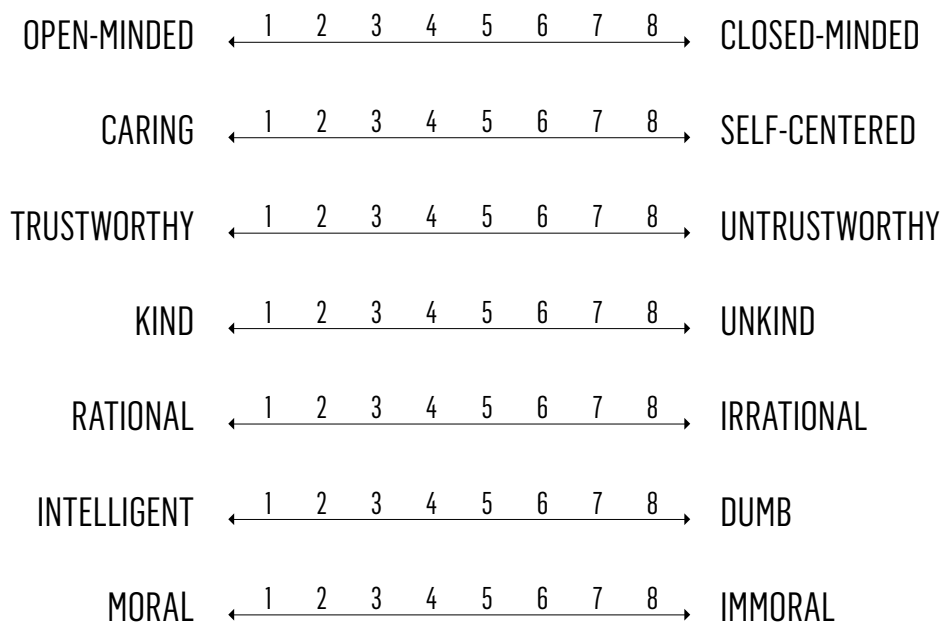
The good news is we have more control over our fear than we think. Our study found a startling common thread among the people who felt the greatest fear and uncertainty around speaking up. They were the people who were also telling themselves the harshest stories about the person they needed to speak to.

“For decades, our research has shown that when we’re talking about issues that are emotionally and politically risky, we tend to see the other person in a more negative light,” added Joseph Grenny, co-

researcher and coauthor of *Crucial Conversations*. “We tell ourselves stories about our situation that turn us into virtuous victims and the other party into evil villains. This storytelling generates emotions of disgust and fear that we bring into the conversation. These emotions are responsible for provoking much of the conflict we experience as opposed to the toxicity of the topic itself.”

Leaning on a long-established concept in psychological research called the Least Preferred Coworker scale, subjects described their level of fear in a recent social situation and their scaled perception of the person(s) they were fearful of addressing:

DO YOU SEE YOUR LEAST-PREFERRED COWORKER AS . . .



Using stepwise regression, researchers measured how much fear could be accounted for by more negative characterizations of others. **The Results?**

Those who tended to tell more extreme stories about their conversational counterparts were more than

3X

more likely to feel fearful *and*

3.5X

more likely to lack confidence in speaking their minds.

The Downward Spiral

When we're fearful and too afraid to speak up because of the stories we're telling about the other side, we begin to slip into the downward spiral. Feelings and stories get worse—and thus become hard to correct.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

YOU AND I DISAGREE



I MAKE A JUDGMENT ABOUT YOU

MY JUDGMENT MAKES ME LESS LIKELY TO TALK TO YOU

THE LESS WE TALK, THE MORE I SOLIDIFY MY JUDGMENT

THE HARSHER I JUDGE, THE LESS WE TALK



SIX PRINCIPLES OF CONFIDENT CONVERSATIONALISTS

Thankfully, spiraling into the depths of judgmental silence isn't our only option when we're confronted with a differing opinion. We studied positive deviants who were less fearful and more confident in similar circumstances and found they're using Crucial Conversations principles to reduce their fear without losing their voice.

Here are six of those principles and examples of each . . .





01

Start with Facts

Carefully lay out the facts behind your point of view. Use specific and observable descriptions.

“We were talking about vaccine mandates. I felt confident sharing information that is not generally known from sources like the CDC website and others to explain my decision. I was calm, able to ask clarifying questions, and confident sharing my decision...”

02

Get Curious

Rather than try to decide “who is right,” sincerely try to understand the world view of the other person. Ask questions, seek to understand, and show interest.

“We discussed our opposing views on the renaming of our university based on racist associations of the current name. My friend saw me in a university t-shirt and came into the conversation hot. As we heard each other out, we realized there was a lot we agreed on.”



03 Make it Safe

When emotions escalate, good Crucial Conversationalists reassure others of their respect for them and point out values they both share.

“Last winter I yelled at a fellow snowshoeing partner as he told me the Dems are shutting down the freedom of speech of conservatives. Then I calmed down and told him that he and I both wanted similar things in our country—safety, jobs, education, protected environment, etc. He tried to engage me on gun rights and I just listened and didn’t get excited. It calmed both of us down.”



04 Be Skeptical of Your Point of View

Conversations work best when you come in with a combination of confidence and humility. Be confident that you have a point of view that is worth expressing, but humble enough to accept that you don’t have a monopoly on truth and new information might modify your perspective.

“My friend and I had a heated conversation about homelessness. We came from different perspectives of who the homeless are (are they lazy drug addicts, or victims of misfortune and mental illness, etc.?). Because we were both open to new information, we both came to a more nuanced view of things. Our conversation ended up at a better understanding.”



05 Don't Focus on Convincing

Don't let your main goal be to change the other person's mind. Instead, encourage the sharing of ideas and listen before responding.

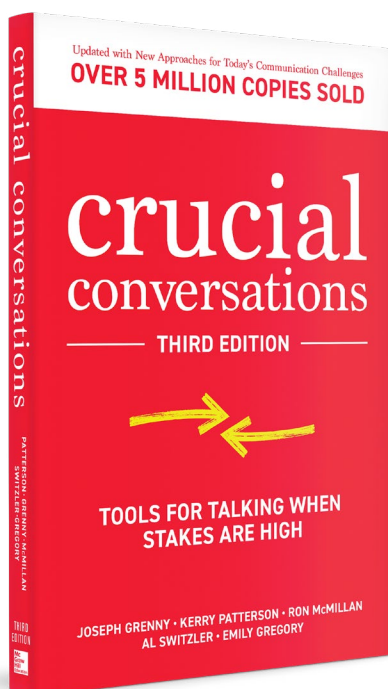
"I've had numerous conversations recently about the prime minister in Canada. My husband believes he's responsible for ruining the country. I felt confident holding the conversation because I can express my views without telling him he's wrong or making him feel defensive. I ask him questions that encourage him to contemplate a different point of view without insisting that he's wrong."

06 Own Your Right to Your Opinion

Rather than rely on others to validate your right to your opinion, take responsibility to validate yourself.

"Our daughter and son-in-law have recently talked to my husband and me about two difficult topics: COVID vaccinations and white privilege. I was uncomfortable discussing them and at first tried to smooth it over, but then gained confidence and was comfortable talking. I recognized that my viewpoints and beliefs are not crazy or ignorant and that I have the right to make my own decisions and talk about why I made them. I resist the pressure to feel like my thoughts and decision are 'less than.'"





Learn More

These tips come from the bestselling book *Crucial Conversations* and award-winning learning experience Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue.

Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue teaches people how to achieve alignment and agreement when stakes are high, opinions vary, and emotions run strong. With skills to speak their minds honestly and respectfully, people collaborate better, make better decisions, and foster workplace cultures of trust, safety, respect, and responsibility. The course is available in on-demand, virtual, and in-person formats. **Learn more at CrucialLearning.com/crucial-conversations-for-dialogue.**

Get Started

To bring Crucial Conversations for Mastering Dialogue skills to your organization for increased productivity and performance, contact us to learn more about our in-person, virtual, and on-demand courses.

Call **1-800-449-5989** or visit us at **CrucialLearning.com**.



Crucial Conversations.
FOR MASTERING DIALOGUE



ABOUT CRUCIAL LEARNING

Formerly VitalSmarts, Crucial Learning improves the world by helping people improve themselves. We offer courses in the areas of communication, performance, and leadership, focusing on behaviors that have a disproportionate impact on outcomes, called crucial skills. Our award-winning courses and accompanying bestselling books include Crucial Conversations®, Crucial Accountability®, Influencer, The Power of Habit™, and Getting Things Done®.

CrucialLearning.com