

Trainers' Talk

Honest conversations



WE DISCOVER, WE GROW

Girlguiding

Introduction

Not all issues are serious but all need addressing honestly. This Trainers' Talk is designed to encourage discussion on this subject of difficult conversations, which may lead to confidence-building ideas to include in training sessions or even the design of a specific training session.

How to use this Trainers' Talk

You could use this Trainers' Talk as a stimulus for discussion during your Trainers' Support Group meeting, for Trainer training or with your Trainer contacts. It is designed to be flexible enough to suit the needs of your group. Alternatively, you could simply use the sub-headings as starting points for independent discussion. There are a few activities included.

The key principles

Deal with the difficulty when it arises, as close to the source as possible (for example, seek your District or Division Commissioner for help rather than going straight to the County Commissioner or even Chief Commissioner) and empathise wherever possible.

Why are the above principles important?

Concern, issue or complaint? The nature of the conversation

Concern a matter of interest or importance to someone; a cause of anxiety or worry

Issue an important topic or problem for debate or discussion

Complaint a statement that something is unsatisfactory or unacceptable

Oxford Dictionaries www.oxforddictionaries.com

It's important to work out the nature of the conversation to be conducted. Discuss with a partner how you would word a question to help participants decide whether you are addressing a slight concern, an issue or a complaint.

Dealing with complaints

It could also be useful to check members' knowledge on how to deal with complaints and safety issues or concerns and where to look for guidance.

- **Girlguiding Complaints Procedure** (www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Policies > Complaints)
- **Safety and Safeguarding Policy** (www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Policies > Safety and safeguarding)
- **A Safe Space leaflet** (www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Building your skills > Safe guiding)

Preparing for the conversation

When a more in-depth conversation is required you need to prepare for it. In preparing you need to consider the following:

- timing
- venue
- safety.
- the issue
- the agenda

Discuss these preparatory steps in small groups. The following words might aid your thinking:

- opening
- behaviour
- short
- inform
- relaxed
- neutral
- closing
- Girlguiding code of conduct.

Strategies for the conversation

Discussing some of the following questions will allow for the exploration of the strategies that may be called upon while leading such conversations.

- How do you make the conversation a discussion and not an interrogation?
- What ground rules would you establish? How would you demonstrate consistency in your leadership approach?
- Why is it important for 'the story' to be described from each perspective?
- When expressing yourself it is best to use statements about your own feelings and observations. Why is this style beneficial?
- Issues are rarely single. Active listening to 'the story' is essential. What might colour the story?
- Managing emotions is not always easy. What can be gained from allowing for moments of silence?
- 'It takes years to build bridges with people and only moments to blow them up.' What are the strategic implications in this statement?
- People are apt to use evasion tactics! Have you ever experienced this and how did you deal with it?
- Closing down effectively is important. What would you be sure to include?

Position versus interest

Most often when we negotiate, we tell the other side what our position is. 'I want you to stop phoning me after 11pm' is a position. Interests, on the other hand, are our real needs, hopes, desires or fears. 'I need to give my partner some peace at that time of night' might be the interest that underlies the position. A productive conversation will help everyone discover their underlying interests and generate solutions to meet these interests, rather than simply having everyone repeat their positions.

When a member states a position, what might you ask to draw the conversation from a position into an interest?

Role play

Have fun discussing short one- or two-liners that promote conversation about issues. Or you could role play the following conversations.

'What's the point of me asking my girls in The Senior Section to come to County events when they are just ignored by the people there? They say that their opinions count for nothing!'

'My Young Leader is off to university next month and she's been waiting two years to get a Mentor for the Leadership Qualification and it hasn't happened! What are you going to do about it?'

For a more in-depth role play, try the following example.

You are an Assistant Unit Leader and a Prospective Trainer. Attending a District meeting, you know that the Training programme booklets for the forthcoming year are available for distribution. The meeting is quite lengthy and the lack of an agenda means that you have no idea when the booklet will be handed round. Eventually, the District Commissioner says that the Training programme books are there and if anyone wants one they can pick them up on the way out. An experienced Leader makes a comment that there is rarely anything new and the Commissioner nods in agreement and hurries on to talk about the District accounts. It appears, from the Commissioner's conversation, that the new Division Commissioner is asking to see the accounts despite the fact that they were not looked at for the last few years and it seems a bit unnecessary! Time is then spent on Brownie 'Revels' and Guide Leaders are told that they could go if they wanted to as it was already 10.30pm.

- Tease out the issues for an honest conversation.
- What do you want to say and to whom?
- When is it best to hold the honest conversation?
- Which method of communication will you use in each case?
- What are the possible outcomes?

Action plan

Whatever the outcome of the conversation, there must be a written record that can be shared with both parties. This might be in the form of an action plan. Design an action plan.

Further resources

There are a number of Girlguiding publications that offer further guidelines to handling difficult situations.

- **Handling Complaints** Good practice guidance to assist you in managing and responding to complaints (www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Guiding roles > Commissioners > Commissioner Resources)
- **Processes for managing adult membership** (www.girlguiding.org.uk/guidingmanual > Supporting info > Managing membership)
- 'Chapter 4: What to do if...' *Commissioner Handbook* (www.girlguidingshop.co.uk order code 6013)
- **How to Hold an Honest Conversation guidelines.** You can find it at www.girlguiding.org.uk > Members' area > Resource library > Trainers' resources > Trainers' Talk.