

Initiating a Difficult Conversation

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Enriching the Relationships that Matter Most!

Sandy was dusting her husband's desk when her eye caught the corner of something stuck underneath. She bent down and what she saw devastated her. There not only was one, but dozens of pornographic DVD's hidden under his desk.

Sandy trembled with rage and fear. "How could he?" she screamed. "He's living a double life!" She began sobbing. Her entire world crumbled before her eyes and she felt helpless to stop it.

Sandy dialed her husband's cell phone but he didn't answer. She felt like screaming "You pervert" but stopped herself. Then she was tempted to just stuff all the video's back under the desk and pretend she didn't see what she saw.

Instead she called me and I was able to see her that day.

Sandy needed to have a very difficult conversation with her husband about his problem. Yet she knew that if she simply blew up, he would get defensive or lie. Pretending everything was fine wouldn't make it so. Sandy knew that she needed to figure out what to say and how to say it so that her words would have maximum impact on him. She didn't want to miss an opportunity to help her husband see that he was caught in a very destructive sin and left unchanged, it would destroy their family.

Whether we need to confront someone caught in a sin, talk with a wayward child, approach a friend about her drinking problem, discuss a difficult family issue or address a co-worker's harmful habit, many of us don't know how to initiate a difficult conversation with someone.. When tough problems surface, instead of talking to resolve them we tend to clam up, blow up or eventually give up.

Here are some steps you can take to make productive conversation with someone more likely.

Pray. Ask God for courage to speak up, wisdom to know what to say and when, and humility so that you will speak the truth, but with grace and love. James 1 says that if we lack wisdom we can ask God and he will give it to us.

Prepare. Hard words need not be harsh words. This is too important a conversation to leave to chance or emotions. Take the time to write out what you want to say and rework it until it says exactly what you want it to say.

Practice. Rehearse out loud what you've prepared. Listening to yourself say what you want to say over and over again will help your emotions calm down and better prepare you to speak calmly but firmly when the time is right. Your words will be better received if you are not overly emotional.

Plan. Don't initiate a difficult conversation when someone is tired, hungry or distracted with other things. After all your prayer, preparation and practice, ask for a time to be set

aside to talk where you can ensure the best chance of being heard. Remember Queen Esther. After praying, preparing and asking the King for an opportunity to talk, she felt that it was not the right time. She requested a new time to have her difficult discussion concerning Haman's treachery.

Don't forget a conversation is a dialogue, not a monologue. When you're finished, respectfully listen to what the other person has to say back. Extend the benefit of the doubt and when you don't understand ask questions to clarify.

Sandy prayed, prepared, practiced and planned a time to confront her husband. She knew that he would listen better after dinner as well as if he did not feel attacked or condemned (although that's what she felt like doing).

Here is what she wrote:

Tom, I'm very sad and hurt and angry about something and I need you to hear what I have to say. While cleaning your office I found some DVD's hidden under your desk. I was totally unprepared for what I saw and it made me physically ill. It confused me and made me question your integrity as a man and our entire relationship.

I know pornography is a problem for many people today and I am not without my own struggles with sin. I'm not here to throw stones at you but I do think you have a serious problem. I want you to know that it hurts me that you would enjoy these kinds of movies. It hurts you to let your mind and heart feed on such things and it hurts our marriage and family.

Right now my trust has been shattered and I don't know how we can possibly rebuild it. I don't know even if I can. But I'm willing to try and work hard, but only if you are willing do some serious work to address this addiction.

Sally practiced what she wanted to say several times. When Tom came home she asked him if they could talk after dinner. She sent the kids to her neighbors so that they would not be present if the conversation deteriorated.

Sandy and Tom are not out of the woods. This conversation is just the beginning but you cannot fix something you are not willing to face. The Bible tells us, "If another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. Share teach other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ." (Galatians 6:1,2)

To learn more about how to handle relationship difficulties, see Leslie's books *How to Act Right When Your Spouse Acts Wrong* and *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship: Seeing It! Stopping It! Surviving It!* Or visit Leslie's website at www.leslievernick.com