This is a script intended for volunteer use in presenting the Difficult Conversations Short & Snappy. This script does not need to be read verbatim, provided the information presented is accurate and consistent with the script.

As a Girl Scout volunteer, you will have the opportunity to develop a working relationship with parents, volunteers, and other members of the community. This module is intended to give you the tools you need when friction arises as you establish these relationships; and as you work towards your common goal of making Girl Scouts a great experience for the girls. In your role as a volunteer it is important that you understand the skills covered in this module and how they can be used to minimize tension and even prevent many difficult situations from arising. In other words, we're going to be discussing why certain conversations are so difficult, and what you can do about it!

(Pass out the handout that accompanies this course)

Objectives:

In the Difficult Conversations module we cover the basics of successfully navigating difficult conversations. The tools this module covers can be applied in Girl Scouting, as well as throughout your daily life. At the end of this module you should be able to: understand why certain conversations are difficult to have, identify the positive impacts that well managed conversations can have, and develop tools to effectively manage difficult conversations.

Origins:

Girl Scout volunteers and families really care about our organization, and our mission. GS isn't just something we do, it's a part of who we are. When you care that deeply about something, it can become internalized as part of your identity. When an element of your identity is challenged, disagreements become much more likely. And when the disagreement involves something you love deeply, something with which you identify on a personal level, it becomes more difficult to resolve. When two people who care very deeply about something disagree, it can be difficult to have a conversation without getting emotionally charged.

That said, the earlier we intervene with positive methods of communication, the better our chances of resolving things and keeping everyone engaged in Scouting.
Common Sources:

Although every situation is unique, there are some common themes that arise when considering the source of a difference.

1. **Unclear Definition of Responsibility** – when collaborating with someone on a project, it’s possible that they do not understand what is expected of them; or what falls under their realm of responsibility.

2. **Limited Resources** – Time, money, space, materials... it all matters and can help/hinder a collaborator from doing their job.

3. **Conflict of Interest** – Two people may ultimately want to achieve the same thing, but go about it in different ways. They may also have completely different visions for what needs to be done.

It’s not all bad!:

Despite how it may make us feel; conflict is not necessarily destructive. Conflict can lead to new ideas and approaches to organizational processes, and increased interest in dealing with problems. Conflict, in this sense, can be considered positive, as it facilitates the surfacing of important issues and provides opportunities for people to develop their communication and interpersonal skills. Conflict becomes negative when it is left to escalate to the point where people begin to feel defeated, and a combative climate of distrust and suspicion develops (Bowditch & Buono, 1997).

The goal is not to avoid conflict entirely, but to prevent a conflict from escalating to a nonproductive, hurtful place. The most effective way to prevent this escalation is in your response to the conflict. Oftentimes this may require a conversation with another volunteer, parent, member of the community that may be uncomfortable but may be necessary. This module covers three different skills that can be used when a conversation is necessary.

Strategies:

We will be covering three strategies for addressing difficult situations in this module. These are very portable techniques, and can be applied in a wide range of circumstances. These techniques are A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening, ERA 1SM, and Careful Communication.

**A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening**

First, use A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening to assess the problem; and to understand the other person’s perspective. In this case, A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening is an acronym to help you enhance your listening skills.
A – Acknowledge the Speaker. This is eye contact and body language. Proper eye contact and body language is good, but don't go overboard! Avoid staring or getting too close as this can make people uncomfortable.

C - Concentrate on the Content. It can be challenging to focus on the message when the speaker is emotional. Be sure to pay attention to the message from the speaker. You cannot solve a problem that you do not understand. Try to strip out the emotion and Concentrate on the Content.

T - Track the Sequence. What happened in what order? We need to understand the order of events to understand the situation. Remember, that when people are emotional, they rarely describe events in the order they occurred.

I - Inquiring Minds Want to Know. Ask clarifying questions to flesh out the details. Try to approach the situation with a sense of curiosity, you'll seem less judgmental and get better results.

V – Vocal & Visual Cues. How emotional is this individual? This could help you determine how they perceive the intensity of the conflict.

E – Emotional Control. Don't let yourself get caught up in the emotion. You will think more clearly and make better choices, if you are controlling your own emotions.

ERA 1SM:

Once you have used A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening to identify the source of the person's concern you can decide if this is an appropriate situation to use ERA 1SM. Use ERA 1SM when you have to say no, deliver bad news, or in a conflict situation. ERA 1SM provides a format to structure a message that could be difficult for the other person to hear. The order of the statements matter.

E – Show Empathy. Open the conversation by showing the listener you understand how they feel.
R – Explain the reason. Keep this simple and straightforward.
A – Offer an alternate solution. Typically this would be one that involves the other person's participation.
1 – Go one step further. This may not always be possible but see if you can.

ERA 1SM Empathy:

Showing empathy for the other person is an important step in ERA 1SM because it sets the ground for your message to be heard. Try opening with phrases like:

I understand, I can appreciate, I'm sorry

The most common and most misused phrase is “I'm sorry.” When you say “I'm sorry” the person you are speaking with may take that to mean that you agree with them or that you are accepting fault for the situation. This mismatch of understanding can prematurely shut down a conversation.

It is appropriate to use “I'm sorry” when...
• You (or the organization) are truly at fault
• It can be used to indicate that you are sorry that someone is experiencing a difficulty EXAMPLE: “I'm sorry that this happened to you....” “I'm sorry that this occurred...”
Careful Communication:

While you are using A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening and ERA 1SM, you always want to consider Careful Communication. To help avoid an escalation, stay away from phrases like:

“You must...” and “Don't ask why, just do it” can be interpreted as you attempting to control their behavior and the situation.

“You always” or “you never” give the impression that you are generalizing a person’s behavior, which can result in the other person focusing more on the exceptions to your statement than the content.

“You know better than that” or similar statements can be perceived as judgmental and can shut down a learning opportunity.

Instead try...

Explaining what you need and why you need it. Rather than generalize explain why something is an issue, and suggest another way of handling it. Assume they had good intentions and made an honest mistake. Rely on A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening to find out what motivated their behavior.

Example Scenario:

Let's take a look at an example scenario and how we would handle the scenario using A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening, ERA 1SM and the principles of Careful Communication.

Imagine you are a troop leader. Sally, a parent of a girl in your troop approaches you after a meeting and tells you “you don't camp enough! When I was a Girl Scout we went camping!”

Begin with some A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening. On your handout you will find a list of possible questions. Next to each question, indicate if it is a ‘helpful’ question or a ‘harmful’ question. ‘Helpful Questions’ can help you identify the source of the issue and ‘harmful questions’ could harm your relationship with Sally. Keep in mind you want to avoid accusations! When you have completed the exercise raise your hand to indicate you are done. Feel free to work with a neighbor in small groups to complete the exercise.

(You may ask for a volunteer to share their answers with the group)

Use A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening:

When you use A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening, it is important to ask open ended questions that do not make assumptions about the other person's intentions or character. The questions that are considered ‘helpful’ questions are examples of the listener trying to learn more about why Sally seems concerned, and to learn more about her history. The ‘harmful’ questions generalize Sally saying that she doesn’t ‘ever step up’ and that she is ‘always complaining’. Even if Sally isn't off-put by these questions, the answers she gives cannot be helpful towards resolving the concern.
Results of A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening:

Based on your conversation with Sally, you were able to identify the reasons why she is so concerned about your troop not going camping very often. Turns out, when Sally was a Girl Scout her troop went camping almost every weekend during the summer and it was a huge part of her Girl Scout experience. In fact; giving her daughter the opportunity to camp was the main reason Sally signed her up for Girl Scouts.

Using ERA 1SM:

For this activity, you will draw lines between the components of ERA 1SM and their corresponding responses. You may choose to work with a neighbor or a small group. Please raise your hand when you have completed the activity.

(you may invite a volunteer to share their responses before explaining the correct answers)

As you address your concerns with Sally, try structuring your conversation like this:

First, show empathy for Sally’s concern: “I understand that you would like to see more camping, and I agree – the girls get so much out of this experience.” Now Sally knows you are on her side – you love camping, too!

Next let her know “As with all activities, for girls to participate there is a volunteer-to-girl safety ratio we need to maintain for safety reasons.” You are showing that you respect Sally by giving her the real reasons, and it’s a reason you can both support. Sally also wants girls to be safe.

Now that Sally understands that you are on her side, and knows the reason that your troop isn’t camping more often you can propose an alternative solution “Can I count on you to team up with another parent to lead our next camping trip?”

You also have the opportunity to go one step further and let Sally know “I can even help you get connected with outdoor training!” This way Sally won’t have to search for the module on her own, and she knows you are there to support her.

Review of Tools:

In this module we covered A.C.T.I.V.E. Listening, ERA 1SM, and Careful Communication. The next time you see a potential conflict on the horizon you can use these skills to address the concerns head on, and ensure the conflict is handled in a productive, supportive manner.

Resources:

Alongside this course, we recommend learning more about the Volunteer Relations process through the Volunteer Relations Process Short & Snappy. The link to this training may be found on the GSSEM.org website.

Where to go for help:

If you need support to address a specific conflict situation, or if you have questions about the content of this module; your best resource to contact is your Troop Support Specialist. If you do not know who your Troop Support Specialist is, please contact 800-482-6734 and our receptionist will connect you to your Troop Support Specialist.

Thank you for completing the Difficult Conversations Short & Snappy and for all you do to support leadership for girls in Southeastern Michigan!