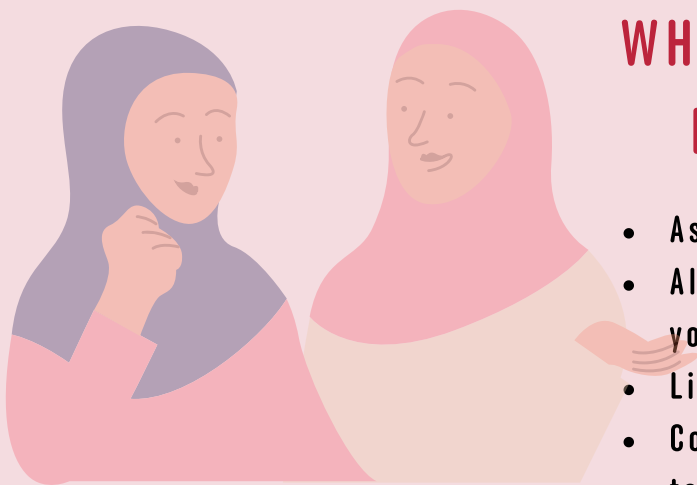


You may at some point need to have a difficult conversation with your mentee, be it around their behaviour, or around what may be a sensitive and emotive issue for them. Sometimes the two may go hand in hand.

HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE HAVING THE CONVERSATION:

- What do you hope to get out of this conversation? What is your motivation for having it?
- Is the conversation to let them know how you're feeling, or to give them space to talk?
- Who are you having the conversation with? You may need to consider a different tone and approach depending on the person and the topic.
- Can you understand their point of view or experience? Or is this something you need to learn about? Do you need to spend some time educating yourself?
- Are you both in a safe space to have this conversation? Emotionally and physically.
- Do you have enough time to have this conversation?



BIFF

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN YOU'RE HAVING THE CONVERSATION:

- Ask open ended questions.
- Allow them space to speak, whilst also expressing your opinion if you need.
- Listen well and be empathetic.
- Conclude the conversation with positive actions to take forward either for you to do, for you mentee to do, or for you to work on together.

If the conversation is around difficult behaviour or difficult feedback, the **BIFF** structure can help you plan out and go about these:

BEHAVIOUR - describe the behaviour factually, with no judgement/interpretation (you could ask if there's a reason for the behaviour at this stage.

IMPACT - describe the impact it's had on you, them or mentoring.

FEELING - "and I feel..." (frustrated/disappointed)

FUTURE - what can they do differently, what can you do about that. "Is there something I can do to help you?"


Starting difficult conversations

The conversation you would like to have may be around a personal and emotional subject for your mentee, such as sexuality, race, identity and wellbeing. These conversation starters may help create a dialogue.

- "I've noticed you mentioned **xxx** before. Would you like to talk about this further?"
- "There's been a lot in the news about **xxx** recently. How do you feel about talking about that with me?"
- "I know that **xxx** has been on the news, I wanted to let you know that I am happy to listen if you want to tell me how you feel. It doesn't have to be today, but I'm here if you ever do want to talk about it."
- "I've been thinking about **xxx** and wondered how you felt about it?"
- "I would love to give you the space to talk about **xxx** if you feel comfortable?"

Remember to give them space to speak and express how they feel, which is something a lot of young people will not have been given the chance to do.

A mentee pair on speaking about Black Lives Matter



MENTOR: "I wanted to make sure there was space for her to talk about what was going on with BLM. So it happened quite naturally – I just initiated by asking her how she was feeling about everything that was going on, and it went from there...my feeling from chats with [my mentee], as well as from researching this stuff for my own teaching at university level, is that it's better to talk about it than not talk about it – I think when people (white people particularly) sidestep conversations about race and racism because they're nervous about putting a foot wrong, it can make others feel unseen and unheard."

MENTEE: "I found that the chat with my mentor on BLM and current social injustices turned out to be a very open conversation in which we were able to honestly give our opinions, and I felt as though it was a safe space to express my thoughts, fears and aggravations. It was also very helpful knowing I can express these emotions in my work, which will hopefully create conversations similar for those who view it."