



Helping Staff Have Critical Conversations

Agenda

Why Critical Conversations

What are Critical Conversations

What do Critical Conversations Look Like?

Critical Conversations for Workers and Supervisors

Practice

Resources

Why Critical Conversations?

- Concerns from Foster Parents regarding staff not providing critical feedback, not listening/hearing their perspective and not providing rationale for agency decisions
- Improve support for staff having critical conversations with Foster Parents (and families)
- Provide information and tools about critical conversations to support your work with staff

ACTIVITY

Think about a time you had a difficult conversation with a Foster Parent that went badly. If you had your time back, what would you do differently and why?

Think for two minutes on your own.

Then turn to your neighbor and share.

Be prepared to report out to the large group.

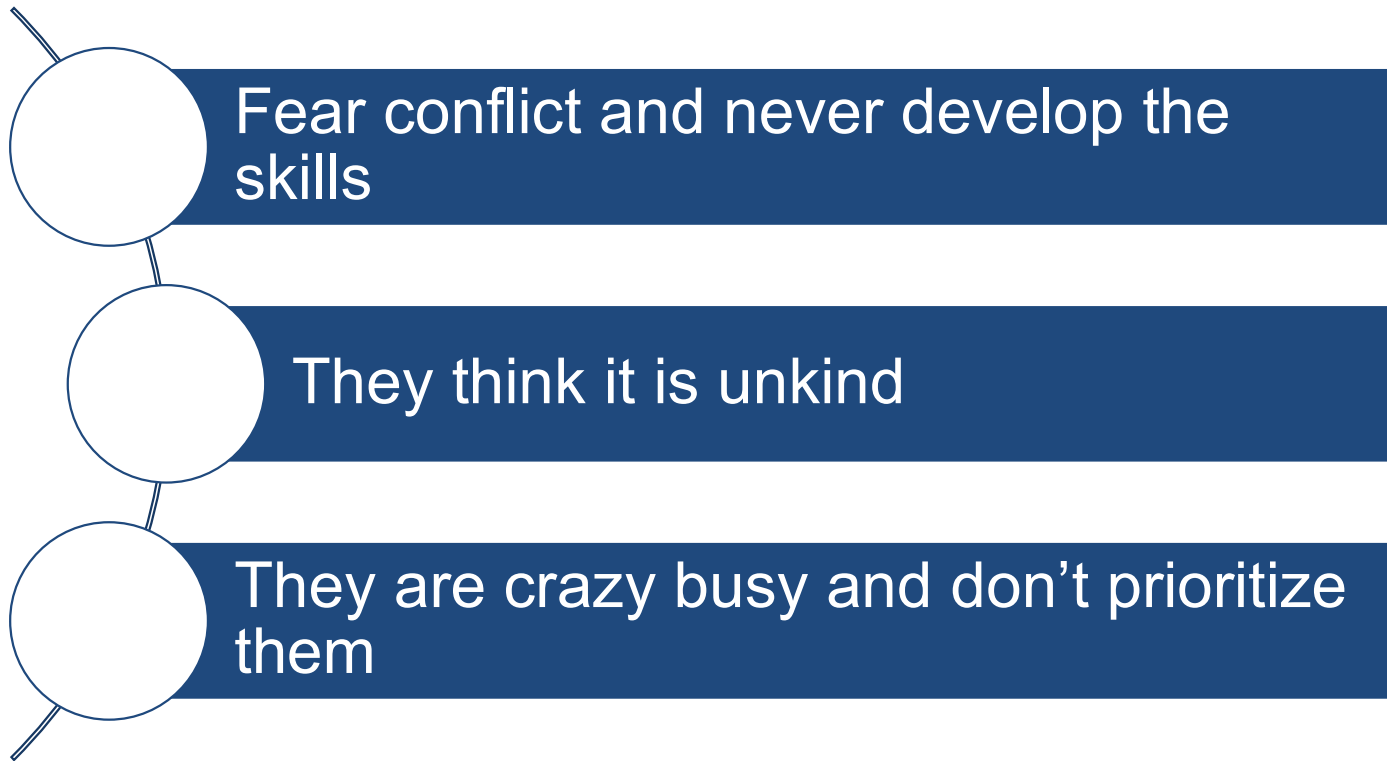
What are Critical Conversations?

Definition

- Also known as crucial conversation, hard conversation, uncomfortable conversation, difficult conversation, and so on....
- A critical conversation is a discussion between two or more people where:
 1. The stakes are high
 2. Opinions differ
 3. Emotions run strong
 4. The outcome significantly impacts their lives and there is a significant risk of negative consequences

Crucial Conversations

Three Reasons People Don't Have Critical Conversations:



2021 LEADYOUFIRST, Dr. Parker Houston. "Leaders Must Be Willing to Have Difficult Conversations."

What do Critical Conversations Look Like?

Preparation for Critical Conversations

Decide exactly what you're dealing with

Understand why you're having the discussion

Choose the right time and place

Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

Stay Engaged

- Remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.

Experience Discomfort

- Discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race.
- Make a commitment to bring issues into the open.
- Not talking about these issues creates divisiveness. Healing and change begin through dialogue, even when uncomfortable.

Speak Your Truth

- Be open about thoughts and feelings.
- Not just saying what you think others want to hear.

Expect and Accept Non-closure

- “Hang out in uncertainty.”
- Do not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding.
- Requires ongoing dialogue.

Adapted from Glenn E. Singleton & Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. 2006. pp.58-65. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Creating a Safe Space



Build Rapport

Demonstrate mutual purpose

Let them know you care about their best interests

Demonstrate mutual respect

Let them know you care about them

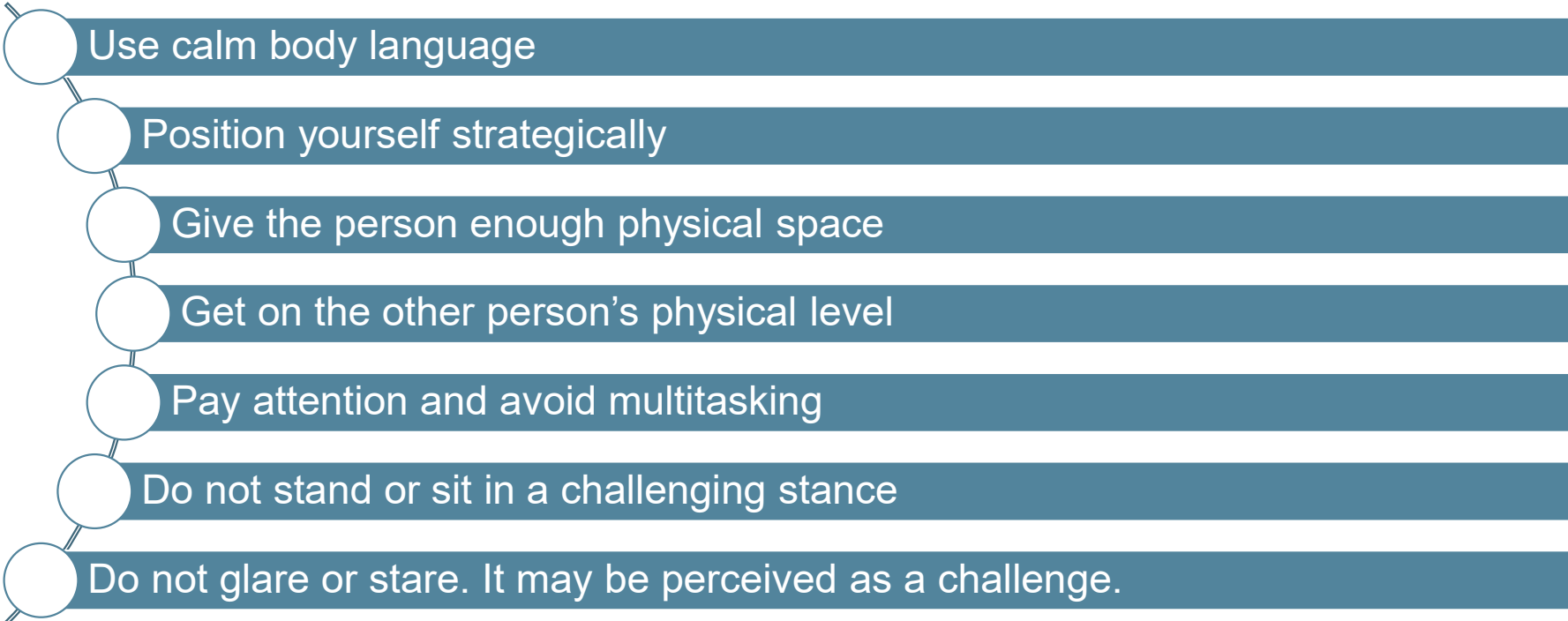
Creating Effective Dialogue



ASK	MIRROR	PARAPHRASE	PRIME
To get the ball rolling.	To confirm feelings.	To acknowledge their story.	If you are getting nowhere.
“I would love to hear your opinion about...”	“You look unsure...”	“So, if I understand you correctly...”	“I guess you must think I’m being unfair...”

Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes are High

Strategies for Effective Nonverbal Communication

- 
- Use calm body language
 - Position yourself strategically
 - Give the person enough physical space
 - Get on the other person's physical level
 - Pay attention and avoid multitasking
 - Do not stand or sit in a challenging stance
 - Do not glare or stare. It may be perceived as a challenge.

<https://familyandcommunityimpact.org/nonverbal-cues-carry-as-much-information-as-words/>

Nonverbal Communication and Potential Conflict

- Pay attention to facial expressions, posture, gestures, and tone of voice.
- Develop your own emotional awareness.
- Do the words match the body language for you and the other person?

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships-communication/conflict-resolution-skills.htm>

Full Disclosure

Information provided to the family by the child welfare agency regarding the steps in the intervention process,

the requirements of the case plan,

the expectations of the family,

the consequences if the family does not fulfill the expectations,

and the rights of the parents to ensure that the family completely understands the process.

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/search/?822E98A70CACF462191B3E33F9A34910=78FC63494EB69782A9B6CBD6521519FDCD3099F3&addsearch=full+disclosure>

Courageous Conversations and Engagement

- Our service looks like engagement.
- We show respect by being prepared for each interaction – whether that interaction is individual or group.

Engagement happens often in the context of courageous conversations.

Creating a Plan for Difficult Conversations

Use your supervisor

- ALWAYS talk through the possible responses and reactions to the topic in advance of your meeting with the family.
- Role play it out. Talk about your possible reactions as well as their possible reactions.

Be rested

- Think about clearing your mechanism (remove distractions) [Clear the mechanism](#)
- Think about the fact that they are human, and you are human.

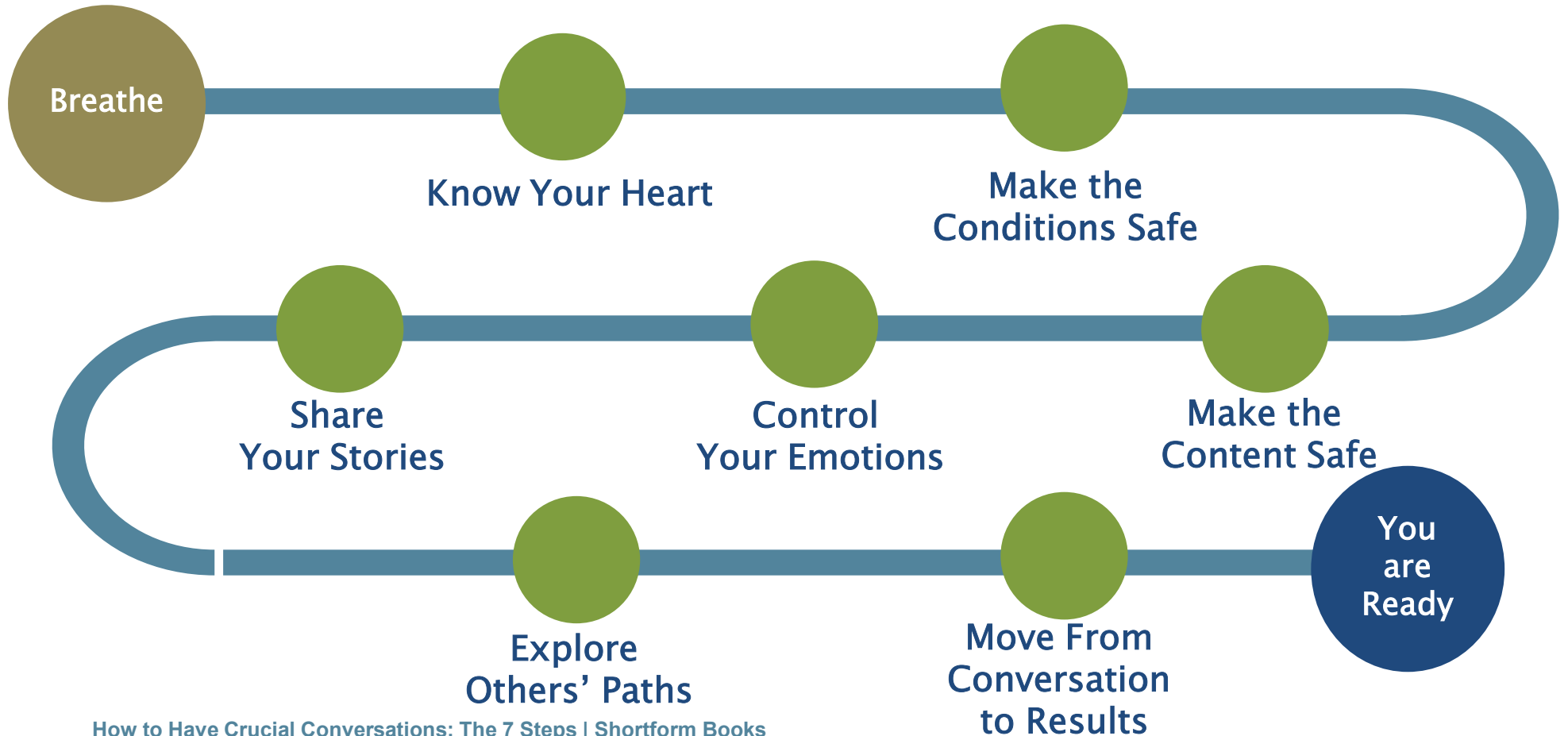
Think about and OWN

- I don't have to have all the answers.
- A lot depends on how I AM with the family member – even more so than what I say.

Think about responses

- You now have tools/skills to pull from – think about what you've learned.
- TRANSFER your learning from the classroom to the meeting space and then to the personal space you and the family member will share in conversation.

Principles to have Critical Conversations



[How to Have Crucial Conversations: The 7 Steps | Shortform Books](#)

Critical Conversations for Workers

Critical Conversations, Case Worker Practice Standards



Communicating



Assessing



Planning

Clearly and openly express to youth and families **what is expected** from them and what they can expect from child welfare.

Remains **non-judgmental** when processing information

Facilitates and engages participants throughout, acknowledging and **managing conflict**

Strategies Workers Can Use to Have Critical Conversations with Foster Parents

- Be clear in the goal for the conversation (what is the end goal)
- Listen first (understand others' perspectives)
- Repeat your understanding of the issues identified (check for clarity)
- Clearly identify the problem (root cause identification, transparency)
- Brainstorm solutions AND decide next steps (action planning)
- Follow up
- Provide regular and ongoing feedback

Ways Workers Can Initiate Critical Conversations with Foster Parents



[How to start a difficult conversation. Never dodge a conversation again! \(skillpacks.com\)](https://www.skillpacks.com)

Critical Conversations for Supervisors

Critical Conversations, Supervisors Practice Standards



Communicating

Conducts **courageous conversations** to address culture and climate concerns



Assessing

Coaches worker skills related to **staying open to different explanations** of events, or keeping biases in check



Implementing

Meets regularly with workers on family progress, providing **honest feedback** and considering suggestions as needed

Ways Supervisors can Initiate Difficult Conversations with Staff



[13 Ways Managers Can Initiate Tough Conversations With Employees \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

Time to Practice

Scenario-Skills Practice

Supervisor

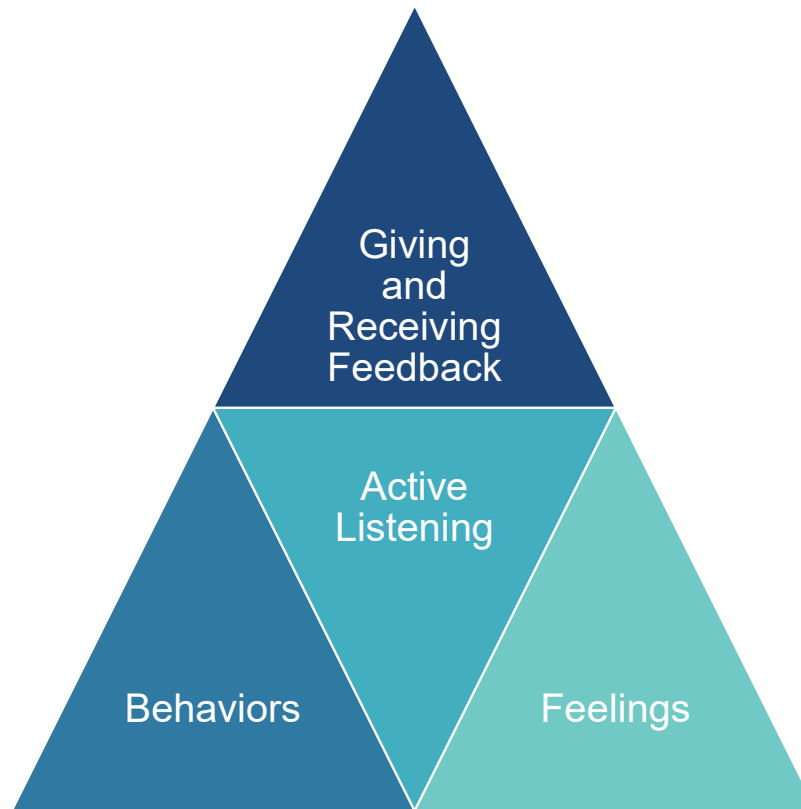
You have received a complaint about your worker Jenny from a foster parent. The Smith children had been moving toward TPR and the foster parents are interested in adopting, but the worker has put a pause on progress and is not willing to change the goal to adoption

Jenny

You are excited as an aunt has been located and is interested in caring for the Smith children. You are dreading having the conversation with the foster parents as they are quite insistent on wanting to adopt

Feedback

Foundational Communication Skills



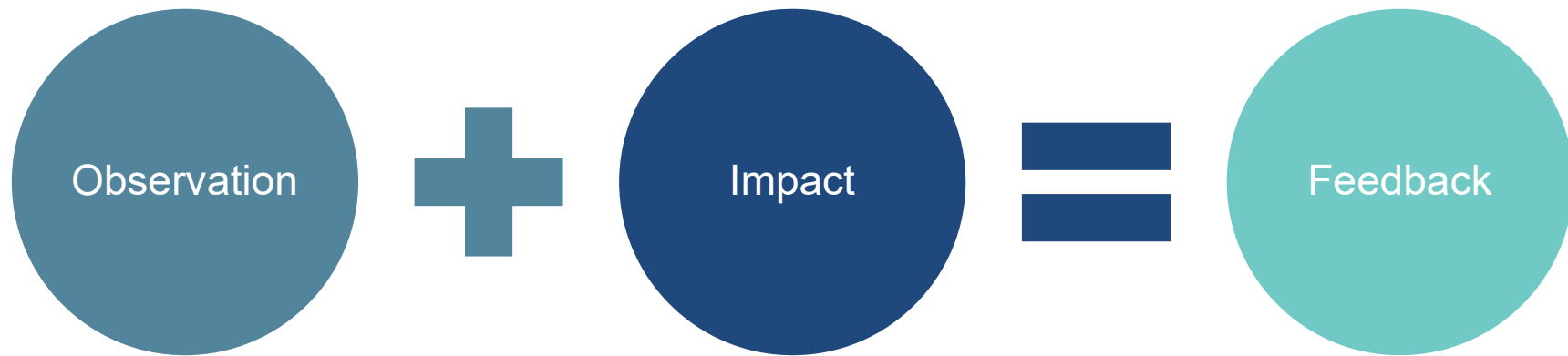
Feedback

- It is **descriptive** rather than evaluative. Example: “I saw you interrupt three people in the last half hour” versus “You are a rude dufus.”
- It focuses on **feelings** generated in the person who has experienced the behavior. Example: “When you interrupt me, I feel frustrated.” This gives clear information about the effect of the behavior, while leaving the person receiving the feedback free to decide what they want to do about it.
- It is **specific** rather than general. Example: “You over explain with excessive detail” versus “you are dominating.”

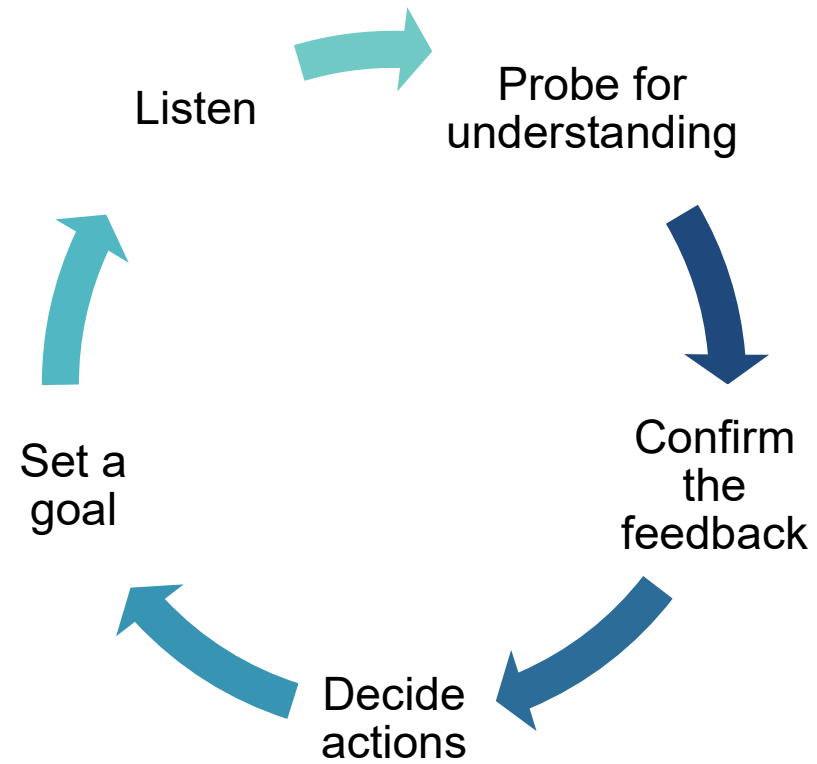
Feedback (continued)

- It is directed toward behavior which the receiver **can do something about**. Example: Practicing not interrupting others.
- It is **solicited** rather than imposed. Feedback is most useful when the receiver feels that they need the feedback (and want it). And it is **well timed!**
- It is checked to **ensure clear communication**. Receiver should rephrase the feedback to check for understanding
- Check **accuracy** with others. Yes, others saw and heard you interrupting during the meeting.

Giving Feedback



Receiving Feedback



Wrap Up