

THIS ISN'T EASY FOR ME TO SAY . . .

How do you tell your neighbours their constant noise is driving you nuts? Or let a friend know they have bad body odour? Here are tips on how to handle life's more difficult conversations



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W E ALL need some help starting those talks we'd rather not have – whether it's confront a sibling who borrows your stuff without asking, a rowdy neighbour or a colleague with a body odour problem.

Let's be honest, we avoid having these conversations because they're a challenge. We're afraid of being too blunt; of speaking too carelessly and making the situation worse. So you keep quiet, hoping things will improve or the situation will resolve itself.

When you don't speak up the other person carries on, oblivious to how you feel, while your frustration, irritation and anger levels rise. Eventually you explode, with disastrous consequences.

There is a better way. In her book *Straight Talk: How to Manage Conversations that*

Scare You author Maureen Collins provides step-by-step coaching on how sensitive and personal issues can be discussed safely and constructively without damaging your relationships. Here are some of her tips:

3 THINGS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU START TALKING

- How high are the stakes (does the conversation have the potential to end a career or personal relationship)?
- Is there a positive outcome for both of you?
- Can you make the conversation inoffensive? Remember, you can't take back words or undo damage.

WHEN YOU CAN'T GET A WORD IN

The friend who talks too much

His or her problems are so much bigger than anyone else's. They're good at drawing others into their problems and stress, and you end up exhausted just listening to them.

Straight-talking tip

This is best tackled while the other person is talking.

Start by asking a question designed to attract their attention, such as "Can I say something?"

Tell the person how much you appreciate their friendship.

Be very careful and specific in describing their behaviour in the current conversation. For example, you could say, "There are things I'd like to tell you and often try to. You ask me a question but before I can answer you start telling me about something else."

Explain how you feel without blaming your friend – "I feel I'm not really part of the conversation."

Try to defuse the person's defensiveness by acknowledging your share of responsibility. You could say, "It's partly my fault. I don't like pushing myself into a conversation."

End the conversation with an apology and reinforce your feelings about your friendship.

(Turn over)