

Managing Difficult Conversations Facilitator Guide

Leader Professional Development
United States Army
Center for Army Leadership





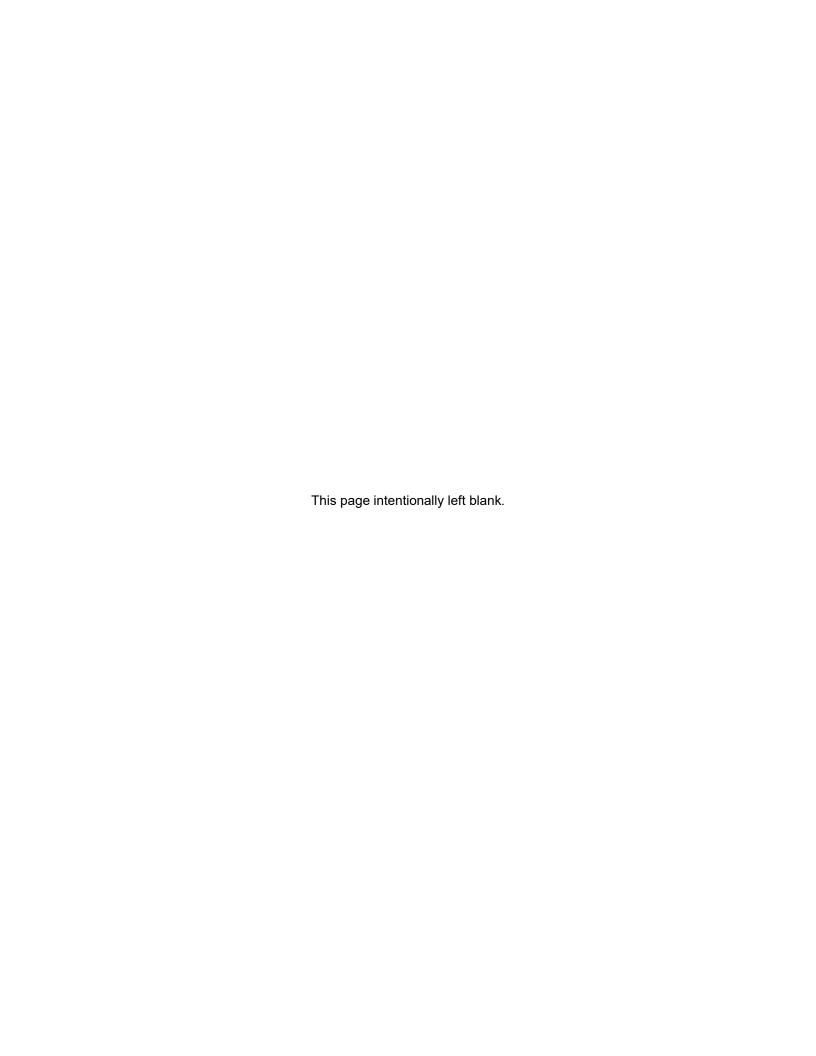


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Introduction

Who is CAL

The Center for Army Leadership (CAL) is the Army's designated action agent for Leader Development and Leadership in the areas of research, assessment, doctrine, initiative management, and quality assurance to sustain excellence in the Army's core competency of growing leaders.

INTENT OF THE LEADER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT KITS

Leadership is the unifying and multiplying element of combat power (ADP 6-0). Leader development programs are a proven method organizations can use to ensure regular improvement and refinement of critical leadership skills. In 2022, CAL began the design and development of a collection of ready-made Leader Professional Development (LPD) kits that you can use to deliver professional development sessions. These LPD sessions are designed to address topics of need; educate you on the Army Leadership Requirements Model (ADP 6-22); generate group discussion by asking thought-provoking questions; help you identify gaps in your unit, team, or organization; and determine actions leaders can take to improve the gaps.

It takes a lot of effort to create slides and briefing materials. Knowing that every Soldier's time is valuable, CAL created a pre-packaged set of materials (slides, facilitator guide, etc.) with everything you need to conduct an LPD. Now you can focus on learning and presenting the materials. Use this LPD kit as an opportunity to have a leader development discussion with others. The intent isn't for you to lecture for an entire session or read slides verbatim. Instead, think about the content, put it in the context of your unit, and get your audience talking about how to improve as Army leaders and a team.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any questions about the LPD kits or have suggestions for additional topics, please contact CAL at usarmy.leavenworth.tradoc.mbx.cal@army.mil.

You can also connect with CAL in the following ways:

- On the web: https://cal.army.mil/
- On Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/USArmyCAL
- On Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/usarmycal
- On Twitter: https://twitter.com/USArmyCAL
- On YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@USArmyCAL

You can find the materials for this LPD, as well as others, at the CAL website at https://cal.army.mil.

Overview

PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION

The goal of this session is to provide an overview of how to manage difficult conversations with subordinates, peers, and senior leaders.

The specific learning objectives for this session include:

- Identify the importance of having difficult conversations.
- Discuss strategies for managing difficult conversations.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this LPD session encompasses all Army leaders.

The optimal facilitator-to-learners ratio for this LPD session is one facilitator to approximately 20 participants. If the anticipated audience is to be more than 20 participants, those organizing the session should consider having multiple facilitators.

NOTE: If the anticipated audience is greater than 50 participants, some features of this Facilitator Guide will have to be adapted. For example, instead of conducting whole group discussions, you may need to split the audience into smaller groups to ensure everyone has an opportunity to contribute. To facilitate group discussions, the allotted time may also need to be increased.

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS

The following table lists recommended materials and equipment for facilitating this session. While these are recommended, not all of the listed equipment is required. For example, if you deliver the session out in the field and do not have access to a computer, monitor, or projector, you can still facilitate the session using just this facilitator guide and participant packets.

Materials	Quantity
Quick Start Guide	1 per facilitator
This Facilitator Guide	1 per facilitator
Participant Packet	1 per participant
Managing Difficult Conversations HandoutAfter Action Review Form	
PowerPoint Slides	1 per facilitator
PC Computer or Laptop	1 per facilitator
Monitor or Projector and A/V cables	1 per room
Screen (if projecting)	1 per room
Chart Paper and Markers or White Board and Dry Erase Markers	1 per room

Documents can be accessed on the CAL website here: https://cal.army.mil/

AGENDA

The session is designed to be presented in a 40-minute block of time. Later in this guide, you will see the suggested timing for each individual slide, from which the below duration times were calculated.

Segments	Duration
Session Opening	2.5 mins
The Importance of Having Difficult Conversations	9 mins
Strategies for Managing Difficult Conversations	25.5 mins
Session Closing	3 mins
Total Duration	40 mins

PREPARING FOR YOUR LPD SESSION

This facilitator guide aims to provide all of the information necessary to lead a successful session and discussion on this topic. To that aim, here are steps that you should take before the session.

- 1. Read through this facilitator guide and review the PowerPoint slides. Make sure you feel comfortable speaking to the key points and leading the discussion(s). Based on the audience, prepare to modify discussion questions to ensure they are meaningful and apply to your specific unit/organization. The more you can get the audience discussing how they can improve the organization by applying the material, the better.
- Be prepared to include personal experiences related to the topic or familiarize yourself with examples you can reference throughout the session. Real-life examples help tie together the individual segments, engage the audience, and enable learners to connect the content to their day-to-day jobs. Feel free to add short video clips or other materials you think the audience would find engaging.
- 3. Familiarize yourself with the suggested timing of slides and discussion activities.
- 4. Determine the anticipated audience size. Recruit additional facilitators or plan for modifications to the session if the audience size exceeds 20 participants.
- 5. Invite the commanding officer or organization director to speak at the beginning of the session to introduce the purpose/intent of the session. This will increase audience engagement and attention.
- Review the additional resources so you can direct the audience to the appropriate information. Share the resources electronically via email before the session. Print participant packets ahead of the session.

How to Use This Guide

The facilitator guide contains PowerPoint slides embedded with facilitation notes and discussion questions to guide you through the session. The facilitation notes include icon cues that are designed to provide visual references for you as to the type of action required, operational instructions, or other special points (e.g., discussion). Each icon is described below.

Icons	Icon Name	Descriptions
二	Slide	This icon indicates that a slide should be presented. An image of each slide in the associated PowerPoint is provided. These slides help you identify which slide goes with each instructional strategy, duration, and key points.
()	Duration	This icon indicates the suggested amount of time to spend on each slide.
	Key Points	This icon indicates the key points that should be covered. Although you should not read the key points verbatim during the session, you can read through it beforehand to familiarize yourself with the content.
	Discussion	This icon indicates that a discussion should be facilitated.
0	Activity	This icon indicates that an activity should be facilitated.
	Resources	This icon indicates when any resource (handout, case study, example, article, etc.) should be used.

How to Facilitate This LPD Session

This section provides you with details on how to facilitate each slide in the session.

Session Opening - Slide 1







1.5 minutes



- Welcome participants to this session on managing difficult conversations. This session
 is part of the Leader Professional Development series designed to address and
 generate discussion about various topics of importance and determine actions you can
 take to improve your organizations.
- Explain that Army leaders often encounter issues that are difficult to talk about.
 Discussions about these issues are known as difficult conversations. Pride may be
 involved, careers may be at stake, or the people involved may not trust each other.
 Any of these factors could mean that an attempt to address the situation could be met
 with defensiveness, resistance, or animosity, but these issues aren't something that
 can just be ignored.
- Explain that in this session, you will identify the importance of having difficult conversations and strategies you can use when discussing hard topics.

ARMY LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS MODEL (LRM) - SLIDE 2



Army Leadership Requirements Model (LRM) PRESENCE—Milliary bearing/Professional bearing/Professional foundation, survive library, budgment, fluency, budgment, fluen



30 seconds



- Explain that it's important that everyone be familiar with the Army Leadership Requirements Model, which lays out the core set of requirements of what the Army expects all leaders to be, to know, and to do. By understanding these expectations, you will be better prepared to deal with a range and variety of situations. Soldiers who regularly and successfully apply these expectations have better trained units, command climates, and leaders who possess the necessary skills to win the fight. The Leadership Requirements Model can be found in ADP 6-22 and FM 6-22, which you should also take some time to check out if you haven't already. ADP 6-22 describes what right looks like for all leaders, and FM 6-22 tells you how to develop as a leader.
- Point out that this leader professional development session ties directly to the Extends Influence competency under the Leads section of the model. Learning how to manage difficult conversations will help you extend your influence by approaching conflict as an opportunity to create shared understanding. Resolving conflict and building consensus are also skills expected of all Army leaders.

SESSION OBJECTIVES - SLIDE 3



Session Objectives

- Identify the importance of having difficult conversations.
- Discuss strategies for managing difficult conversations.



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30 seconds



- Explain that by the end of this session, you will be able to:
 - Identify the importance of having difficult conversations.
 - Discuss strategies for managing difficult conversations.
- To help make this session as impactful as possible, encourage participants to contribute to the discussions with their own perspectives, reflections, and experiences.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS - SLIDE 4







30 seconds



 Explain that in this section, we'll discuss why it's important to have difficult conversations and when they are most likely to occur.

DISCUSSION - SLIDE 5



Discussion



 Consider a time when you had a difficult conversation. What made the conversation difficult? Was it the other person, your delivery, the situation, or a hard topic to discuss?

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5 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - Consider a time when you had a difficult conversation. What made the conversation difficult? Was it the other person, your delivery, the situation, or a hard topic to discuss?

Answers will vary but mention that there are a lot of variables that can make conversations difficult. When a conversation becomes difficult, consider what things are within your control and how you can approach them.

WHY HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IS IMPORTANT - SLIDE 6



Why Having Difficult Conversations Is Important

- Difficult conversations can help you:
 - · Explore different perspectives
 - · Find solutions
 - · Maintain a respectful climate
 - · Build trust
 - · Maximize mission success



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1.5 minutes



- Explain that whether the issue is with a subordinate, peer, or superior, addressing it
 promptly and skillfully will lead to the best outcomes for the team and mission. Having
 difficult conversations can help you:
 - Explore different perspectives You can use difficult conversations as opportunities to learn more about someone else's perspective. Learning about others' perspectives can help you better understand complex issues.
 - **Find solutions** Difficult conversations can also force you and the other person to find solutions that benefit both parties and the organization.
 - Maintain a respectful climate By addressing issues directly, you can work together to resolve them and maintain a respectful and productive work environment.
 - Build trust If team members don't trust each other, critical information may be held back, and bad decisions can be made. If difficult conversations are avoided, conflicts can drag the whole team down and become worse in the future.
 - Maximize mission success Having difficult conversations can help you identify and resolve misunderstandings as soon as possible to maximize both team and mission success.

WHEN DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS ARE LIKELY TO OCCUR - SLIDE 7



When Difficult Conversations Are Likely to Occur

With Subordinates

- Counseling a subordinate for poor performance
- Explaining why a subordinate did not have a good evaluation
- Explaining why a subordinate did not get a position they wanted

With Peers

- Rebuilding trust after a competition with your peers gets out of hand
- Offering advice to peers on how to improve their performance
- Resolving disputes with peers that spill over from another group or event

With Superiors

- Receiving guidance from a senior leader that you do not agree with
- Making a senior leader aware of the risks of different courses of action
- Making sure expectations for troops are realistic and using training mistakes as lessons learned
- Asking a senior leader why you received negative feedback

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7



2 minutes



 Explain that as a leader, there will be many situations in which you'll have to have difficult conversations with a subordinate, peer, or superior. While this list does not cover every possible situation, some examples include:

With Subordinates:

- Counseling a Soldier for unsatisfactory performance.
- Explaining why an officer isn't receiving top marks on an evaluation.
- Explaining why an officer can't take the new position of his choice.
- Explaining to a Soldier why they didn't get the slot for a school they wanted to attend.

With Peers:

- Rebuilding trust after a competition for an award gets out of hand.
- Helping peers improve performance when they don't want to hear it.
- Resolving disputes that spill over from the Family Readiness Group.

With Superiors:

- Receiving guidance from a senior leader that you do not agree with.
- Making a senior leader aware of the risks of different courses of action.
- Making sure expectations for troops are realistic given their skill level and available resources, and helping training mistakes become lessons learned.
- Seeking clarification on negative feedback that's perceived as unfair.
- Note that sometimes you will need to have difficult conversations about sensitive topics, such as SHARP or EO issues, inappropriate political conversation, and debate

about the COVID vaccine. When this occurs, you need to have the courage to discuss these sensitive topics.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS - SLIDE 8







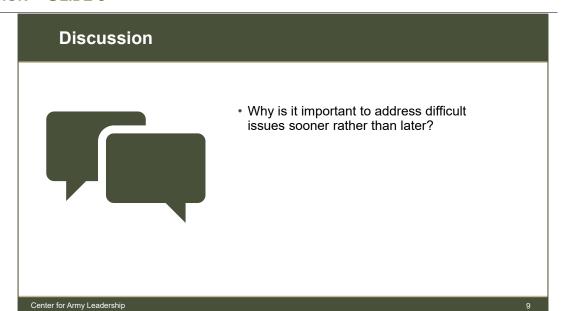
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 Explain that in this section, we will discuss some strategies that you can use at the start, during, and closing of difficult conversations.

DISCUSSION - SLIDE 9







3 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - Why is it important to address difficult issues sooner rather than later?
 Answers will vary but explain that it's important to address difficult issues right away. Unresolved issues usually cause extra tension in the organization.

Choosing How to Address a Situation – Slide 10







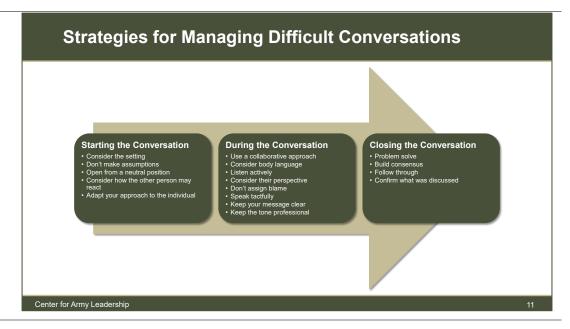
1 minute



- Explain that there are a few things to consider when choosing how to address a situation.
- Explain that sometimes a direct conversation isn't the best approach. For example, you
 might plan to have a conversation with someone, but after thinking about it, you realize
 you're making the problem seem bigger than it really is.
- Explain that there may be times when you think a difficult conversation won't change things; however, initiating the conversation can open up channels of communication. Consider ways you can open channels of communication to initiate the conversation. Don't be discouraged when an immediate solution appears unlikely. Sometimes, getting an individual to have the discussion with you is half the battle.
- Point out that you may also encounter situations that can be more effectively
 addressed through an indirect method, particularly if the issue is sensitive. For
 example, if the issue impacts an entire team, it may make more sense to hold a group
 meeting to hear different perspectives and help ensure there aren't any
 misunderstandings.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS - SLIDE 11







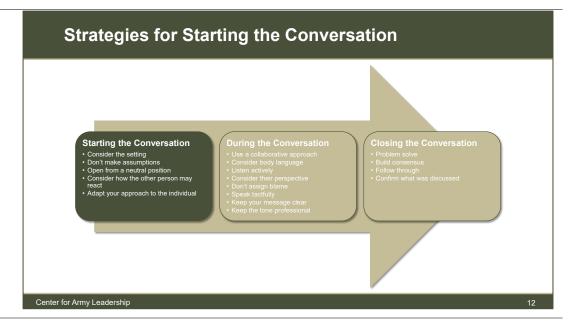
30 seconds



- Explain that as Army leaders, we all participate in difficult conversations when the need arises, whether it's counseling junior Soldiers, addressing unacceptable behavior, or addressing our own shortcomings.
- Explain that the following slides provide some strategies you use can use at the start of, during, and at the closing of difficult conversations to help them stay productive.

STRATEGIES FOR STARTING THE CONVERSATION - SLIDE 12







2 minutes



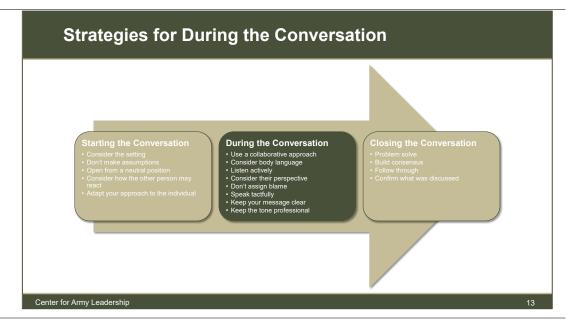
- Explain that you can use the following strategies to help get your conversation started on the right foot:
 - Consider the setting Think about when and where you plan to talk to the other person and determine if the setting supports what you are trying to accomplish. When possible, pick a comfortable location and provide the other person with advanced notice. In some situations, you may need to change the setting from a group to an individual conversation to reduce the chance you will embarrass or shame the other person.
 - Don't make assumptions Since you can't really know someone's intentions, don't assume they are bad. Conversely, don't assume that because you have good intentions the other person sees it that way. Instead, ask open-ended questions to help the other person feel comfortable so they are more likely to explain what is truly bothering them.
 - Open from a neutral position When the conversation starts, approach it from the perspective of a neutral observer to avoid turning it into an argument. Keep your cool and control your tone of voice and body language.
 - Consider how the other person may react When someone feels threatened, they usually react strongly, and this can make it hard to resolve problems. Think about how hierarchy may impact the conversation. You should also be aware of your own triggers to help you stay balanced during the conversation.
 - Adapt your approach to the individual Recognize that what works for one
 person won't always work for everyone. Consider the other person's strengths and
 weaknesses, motivations and drivers, and communication style to adapt your
 approach to the individual.



• Refer participants to page 1 of the Managing Difficult Conversations Handout to learn more about strategies they can use to start the conversation.

STRATEGIES FOR DURING THE CONVERSATION - SLIDE 13







2 minutes



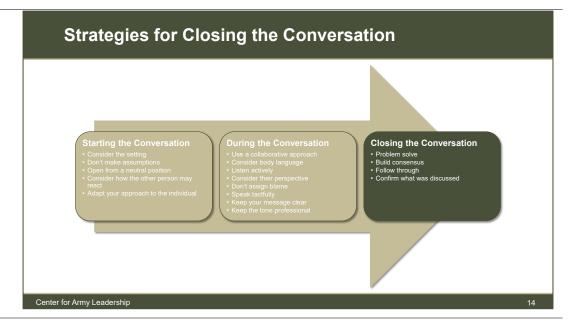
- Explain that you can use the following strategies during your conversation to help make sure it remains professional and effective:
 - Use a collaborative approach Work through issues together and find a solution where both sides' concerns are addressed.
 - Consider body language By watching the other person's body language, you
 can identify the emotions behind the words and understand their complete
 message.
 - Listen actively Avoid interrupting the other person or being distracted during the conversation. Instead, ask the other person questions to clarify their points and to create a shared understanding of their perceptions, assumptions, and feelings. When the other person knows that you are listening actively, it can help them feel like they are being heard and increase the likelihood that they will listen to you.
 - Consider the other person's perspective Learn about the other person's point
 of view by imagining what they might be thinking and why.
 - Don't assign blame If people think they will be blamed, they may be less likely to cooperate. Instead, explore how each person contributed to the situation.
 - Speak tactfully Be honest when expressing yourself, while considering how
 your messaging of the situation might make the other person feel. How you deliver
 the message can also impact how the other person reacts.
 - Keep your message clear Stay on message by remembering what you want to say so you don't get sidetracked. Be respectful and avoid using loaded words that can generate strong emotions and lead to a negative reaction from the other person.
 - Keep the tone professional Don't be afraid to speak up but remember to maintain a professional tone throughout the exchange. Focus on keeping the conversation constructive to help the individual identify solutions.



 Refer participants to pages 1 and 2 of the Managing Difficult Conversations Handout to learn more about strategies they can use during the conversation.

STRATEGIES FOR CLOSING THE CONVERSATION - SLIDE 14







1.5 minutes



- Explain that you can use the following strategies to close your conversation to help it end on the right note:
 - Problem solve –Take the lead in brainstorming potential ways to resolve the issue.
 - Build consensus By sharing ideas, brainstorming together, and seeking common ground, you can help overcome resistance.
 - Follow through Be persistent and stick with it; difficult conversations can take time and patience to resolve. There is no guarantee that everything will be fixed within a certain amount of time. It may even be necessary to have more than one discussion with the other person.
 - Confirm what was discussed Confirm the results of the conversation with the other person and identify next steps.

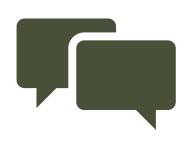


Refer participants to page 2 of the Managing Difficult Conversations Handout to learn more about strategies they can use to close their conversation.

DISCUSSION - SLIDE 15



Discussion



- · Consider the following situations:
 - A subordinate regularly distracts everyone from their work.
 - A peer makes jokes about another Soldier's religion.
 - A leader openly discusses a subordinate's performance with other subordinates.
 - A peer you offered advice to doesn't seem receptive during the conversation.
 - A subordinate appears anxious or upset at the beginning of a difficult conversation.
 - A subordinate continues to have performance issues several weeks after the conversation.
- What strategies could you use when responding to these situations? Consider strategies that have worked for you in the past or new strategies you would like to try.

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15



15 minutes



- Ask participants:
 - Consider the following situations:
 - A subordinate regularly distracts everyone from their work.
 - A peer makes jokes about another Soldier's religion.
 - A leader openly discusses a subordinate's performance with other subordinates.
 - A peer you offered advice to doesn't seem receptive during the conversation.
 - A subordinate appears anxious or upset at the beginning of a difficult conversation.
 - A subordinate continues to have performance issues several weeks after the conversation.
 - What strategies could you use when responding to these situations? Consider strategies that have worked for you in the past or new strategies you would like to try.

Answers will vary. If time allows, feel free to add additional situations that can help you dive into other strategies discussed during this session.

WANT TO LEARN MORE? - SLIDE 16







1 minute



 Point out that, given the time constraints, we couldn't cover everything in detail. To learn more about managing difficult conversations, go to the CAL site and check out these resources.

AFTER ACTION REVIEW - SLIDE 17



After Action Review

- Complete the AAR form in your Participant Packet and return it to the facilitator.
 - The form allows you to provide feedback about this session.
 - Your feedback will be used to improve future deliveries of this session.

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1 minute



• At the end of the session, tell participants to complete the AAR form in their Participant Packet (also on the next page for your reference) and to return it to you before they leave.



- Tell participants that:
 - The form allows them to provide feedback about the session.
 - Their feedback will be used to improve future deliveries of the session.

Managing Difficult Conversations After Action Review Form

Purpose

The purpose of this After Action Review (AAR) is to help your organization improve its Leader Professional Development program. Your feedback will help identify areas of this session that went well and areas that could be improved.

Session Goals

The goal of this session was to provide an overview of how to manage difficult conversations with subordinates, peers, and senior leaders.

After you participate in this session, it is expected that you will be able to:

- Identify the importance of having difficult conversations.
- Discuss strategies for managing difficult conversations.

Your Feedback

Answer the following question below:

Question	Your Feedback
Were the goals of this session met? If not, explain why.	
What went well during this session?	
Are there any areas in which the session could be improved? If so, please specify.	

LET'S CONNECT - SLIDE 18



Let's Connect

On the web: cal.army.mil
On Facebook: USArmyCAL
On Instagram: @usarmycal
On Twitter: @USArmyCAL

On YouTube: @USArmyCAL

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1 minute



Display this slide while participants are completing their After Action Review.