



# OMBUDS OFFICE

Harvard Medical School • Harvard Dental School • Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

## Having a Difficult Conversation on Zoom

### Tips for Having a Difficult Conversation on Zoom

- Share agenda or intentions in advance if possible. If you are planning on having a difficult conversation, giving the other individual a heads up about the nature of the discussion can help.
- Encourage Two-way communication. With Zoom it can be easy for one person to dominate the conversation and not pick-up on cues about when to stop talking or to speak up. Try to think of a Zoom call as you would an in-person conversation, where both participants have a chance to speak into the conversation.
- Make conversation feel as comfortable as possible. Just like you might casually begin a conversation in person with small talk about someone's day, the same approach can help put other person at ease by allowing time for a transition into the conversation.
- Minimize Distractions. Pay careful attention to place and time to ensure that the likelihood of distractions will be minimized. As always there are some things that are unexpected but try to find a room that is quiet in the house or schedule important calls at a time you may be less likely to be distracted by others.
- Practice active listening skills. Listening is just as important virtually as it is in-person.
- Recognize that emotional cues can be harder to read virtually. Take time to check-in more often or if having a group discussion, utilize chat box or other tools for people to express themselves.
- Be Flexible. We are all trying our best during these uncertain times. If distractions occur or some unforeseeable situation arises, like a connection issue, be flexible. Be willing to reschedule or give the other person sometime to step away if they need to.

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**OFFICE** 617-432-4041 **WEB** [hms.harvard.edu/departments/ombuds-office](https://hms.harvard.edu/departments/ombuds-office) (includes self-help resources)

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