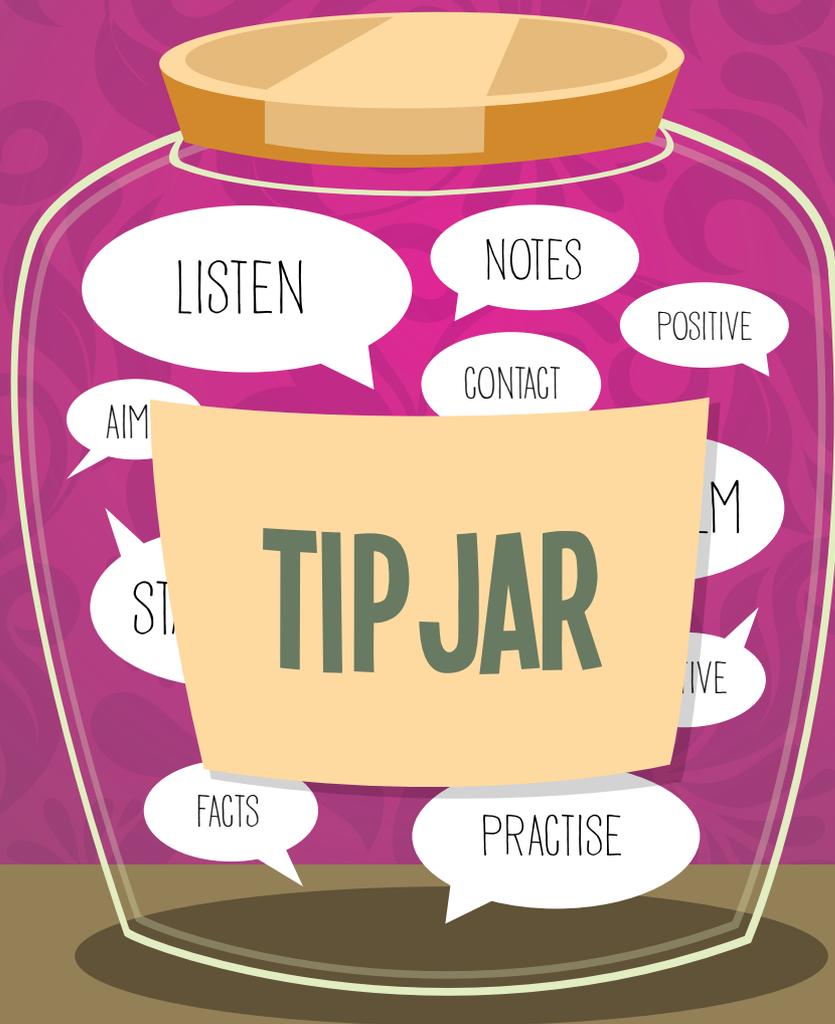


Tips for tricky conversations



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Tips for tricky conversations

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Some conversations are just not easy to start. It might be that we can't find the right words, we feel nervous, upset or angry or we just don't know how to approach the subject.

Being at university offers us the chance to deal with new situations, but sometimes we need a helping hand when dealing with some of the more negative situations, such as an issue with accommodation or a landlord. Below are some helpful hints for having those tricky conversations:

1. Consider the best form of contact

Would it be best to contact the person by email in order to document everything that you want to say? Or would a more informal chat, face to face work better? It can be hard to convey your tone through electronic methods so sometimes you need to consider what form of contact best suits the situation.

2. Start the conversation

Aim to be friendly, but firm in your approach and state clearly what it is that you want to discuss.

3. Make notes

Jot down what it is that you want to get across and what you want to achieve from the conversation. This will help to keep you focused on the point of the conversation.

4. Aim to communicate open and honestly

State what you want and remember to remain respectful. Be clear on what the issue is, you need to give the other person the best possible chance of understanding your problem.

5. Be an active listener

Give the other person opportunities to speak and try not to interrupt. Show that you are listening and taking on board their point of view.

6. Stick to the facts

When we are involved in a situation, it is easy to become emotionally involved. However you chose to contact the person in question, keep your points factual, things that you can back up with an example and avoid offering too much that could be seen as an opinion.

7. Stay calm

Dealing with an issue that makes you emotional can make it hard not to become angry or upset when you are talking about it. Take a deep breath, try to keep your voice as normal as possible and use your notes to keep you on topic.

8. Aim to maintain the relationship

The ideal solution is that that your issue is addressed and the lines of communication are still open between you and the other person. Many people will appreciate an honest approach and this can often strengthen the lines of communication.

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9. Practise

Try rehearsing what you are going to say and how you are going to say it, either in front of a mirror or with a friend. This is a good chance to get clear what you want to say, as well as to see how you are coming across to others.

10. Aim for assertive

Becoming passive or aggressive is not going to achieve the outcome that you want. Just make sure that you don't get heard because you're screaming at them! Being assertive means that you are sharing your side of a situation in a respectful way and trying to find a means of resolution.

11. Don't be ignored or dismissed

You have a right to be heard. For example, if you call the person in question and they say that they can't talk to you, arrange another time that you can call or meet up to discuss the issue.

12. Be positive

Try not to focus solely on the negative, acknowledge any positives that there are in the situation.

13. Stick to how you feel

Start sentences with 'I feel...' or 'I think...'. If we start our sentences with 'You always...' or 'You never...' it can sound like we are being accusing or aggressive.

Remember!

These tips can be applied to a variety of situations including discussing issues with your housemates or neighbours and raising a concern with university staff or an employer.

Peer coaching is a great way of talking through a problem and finding a solution that suits you. Call the SU on 0191 515 3030 or visit www.sunderlandsu.co.uk/peersupport for more information.

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