When a Conversation Gets Tense

A pocket guide from Dialog Works

First, slow it down. Pause. Breathe. A question buys time for everyone.

1. Prepare yourself

Ask yourself: What is happening in me right now?

2. Get curious

Ask them:

- Where does this come from for you?
- What do you feel is at stake?
- Can you tell me more?

Let them know that they matter.

3. When you disagree, honor the person and stay honest.

Try saying: "I want to be in this conversation with you. I'm also troubled by what you just said."

4. Build capacity

Ask: Where can we practice this before the stakes are high?

If a comment harms someone in the room, step in: "Let's pause. I want everyone here treated with respect."

Want to rehearse a hard conversation? sdp.dialogworks.org

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