



Handling Difficult Conversations with Confidence

A Guide for USPS Leadership

Difficult conversations are a part of every leader's role—whether addressing performance concerns, workplace conflict, or personal challenges that impact the job. How you approach these conversations can make the difference between resolution and resistance.

The EAP is here to support both your leadership and your team's well-being during these moments.

Handling Conflict & Performance Talks

Prepare with Purpose

- Know the key points you need to address
- Focus on specific behaviors, not personal traits
- Anticipate possible reactions, and stay calm

Be Clear and Direct—But Respectful

- Use neutral, non-judgmental language
- Stick to facts and observations
- Avoid assumptions

Create Space for Two-Way Dialogue

- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen actively and without interruption
- Acknowledge feelings, but focus on solutions

Balancing Accountability with Compassion

- Balance empathy and accountability
- Recognize personal struggles affect performance
- Use supportive language: "I'm here to support you."

Need Help Having the Conversation?

The EAP offers consultation for supervisors on how to approach sensitive conversations with clarity and care.

*EAP counselors have master's degrees and are licensed professionals. Your privacy is protected by strict federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations and by professional ethical standards for counselors. Information you share with the EAP may not be released to anyone without your prior written consent, except as required by law (e.g. when a person's emotional condition is a threat to him or herself or others, or there is suspected child or elder abuse) or the issuance of a court order upon a showing of good cause.

Quick Tips for Difficult Conversations

DO:

- Stay calm and prepared
- Focus on behaviors
- Speak clearly and kindly
- Offer the EAP as support

AVOID:

- Entering emotionally or unprepared
- Judging character or motives
- Using vague or harsh language
- Using EAP as a threat or mandate

When to Suggest the EAP

The EAP can be offered as a resource during difficult conversations—but how you mention it matters.

- Frame it as a confidential, voluntary benefit
- Offer it as one option among others for support
- Normalize the EAP's use
- Avoid tying EAP use to disciplinary action