

Talk # 3 – Silence or Control

My name is _____,

and my talk is about How We Recognize and Respond to a Crucial Conversation.

Have you ever been in a conversation where there was yelling, or someone said nothing or maybe words were exchanged but regretted later? We can easily go off on tangents, use harsh language or name-calling, or go back to silent fuming. This talk will help you to notice when others begin to feel unsafe in conversations as well as your own reactions when having tough conversations.

The first step is to stay alert for the signs in yourself and the other person that a normal conversation is turning crucial. For some people, there are physical changes. Their stomach may get tight or their voice may get higher. Other people have changes in their emotions. They realize they are scared, or angry, or hurt, and they begin to react to those feelings. And still other people have behavioral changes. It's like an out-of-body experience for them. They see themselves raising their voice, or pointing their finger, or just becoming very quiet.

And once the signs are there that a conversation is crucial, most of the time people respond in one of two ways. We'll call those two ways **Silence** and **Control**. Those of us who move to silence, start withholding information to avoid potential problems. Or we use verbal games by not sharing our true opinions or we use sarcasm. We sometimes avoid sensitive subjects and steer the conversation to something safe to talk about.

Here's an example - "I'm tired of talking about this. Did you hear what happened in the dorm last night?" Another way to go to silence is to avoid the person who wants to speak with us. And if we can't do that, we just walk away from the conversation. Some of us even decide to leave the room.

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If you remember the story of Jonah, God told Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and speak out against it, because the people there were wicked. This obviously was a crucial conversation for Jonah. But what did he do? He chose Silence. He was so afraid, not only did he leave the room, he headed in the opposite direction of Nineveh and left the country! And we all know the rest of that story!

For others of us, instead of responding with silence, we respond with Control. We attempt to control by either forcing our view or dominating the conversation. Do any of these methods sound familiar? We cut others off. We use words like **always** or **never**. We say things like - “You always leave this room a mess!” or “You never do a good job!” We label people into categories. We attack the person speaking by belittling or threatening them. We become more interested in winning the argument and making the other person suffer than having a conversation. But in order to have a successful result, we need to pay attention to silence and control responses in a conversation.

Speaker Testimony *(please keep your comments to 5 minutes or less)*

What is your default mode when you experience a crucial conversation: silence or Control? Recall a situation when you used one of these methods and your attempt at a crucial conversation failed.

Group Discussion

1. What do you do when talking turns tough? Do you respond with Silence or Control?
2. What steps can you take to pay attention to how others feel in conversations with you?