

## ASSERTIVE CONVERSATIONS AND VALUES

The concept of assertive conversations builds on the work of Susan Scott, Transactional Analysis and the principles of assertive behaviour.

This in turn helps everyone to think about how this type of communication, helps NHS Supplychain to deliver on its values.

### **Trust**

Trust grows when we are open and honest. Ask thoughtful questions, set clear expectations, and address reality directly. Speaking with clarity and respect shows we trust others and creates the safety needed for meaningful dialogue.

### **Community**

We are part of something bigger. Strong conversations help us listen, understand different perspectives, and solve challenges together. They break down silos, build shared ownership, and help us move forward collectively.

### **Authenticity**

Being authentic means being real, clear, and kind. Say what needs to be said, even if it's uncomfortable, in a way that maintains respect. Honest conversations strengthen relationships rather than weaken them.

The organisation's universal behaviours describe how these values show up in action.

In everyday work, this means:

- Listening to understand, not simply to reply
- Being clear about expectations and checking shared understanding
- Addressing issues early, before they grow into larger problems
- Giving honest, constructive feedback that supports development
- Taking responsibility for the tone and emotional impact, we create
- Speaking up with ideas or concerns in a solution-focused way

This communication sits well with Transactional Analysis (TA), which explains how we act in conversations. We can operate from different "ego states", Parent, Adult, or Child, which affect how we send and receive messages. Under stress, we might become critical, defensive, withdrawn, or overly compliant. These reactions are natural, but rarely productive.

This type of communication helps us pause and respond intentionally. The goal is to stay in the Adult place with some Nurturing Parent and Natural Child: calm, curious, supportive, respectful, and focused on reality. From here, we can challenge, listen, and find solutions without blame or avoidance.

By bringing this thinking together, we strengthen our ability to:

- Notice our reactions before responding.
- Stay curious rather than becoming judgmental.
- Take ownership of how we communicate.
- Build conversations based on mutual respect rather than assumption or hierarchy.

In practical terms, this is about being deliberate in how we show up. It means choosing conversations that reflect our commitment to trust, community, authenticity, and shared accountability. It means being willing to address reality, even when it feels uncomfortable, because avoiding it rarely serves patients, colleagues, or outcomes.

Susan Scott called this type of communication Fierce Conversations. These are not an additional initiative or a communication technique to add to our workload. They are a way of working, way of leading, collaborating, and delivering our purpose more effectively.

This booklet is designed as a practical companion, helping you connect the Seven Principles of Fierce Conversations to your day-to-day work. Whether you are leading a team, contributing as a colleague, or partnering across services, the invitation is the same:

- Engage in conversations that are clear, respectful, and courageous.  
Address what matters.  
Strengthen relationships rather than avoid difficulty.
- Because when we improve the quality of our conversations, we improve how we work together, and ultimately, how well we serve patients.

## THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF FIERCE CONVERSATIONS

### **Principle 1: Have the Courage to Look at Reality**

In busy teams, it is easy to work around issues rather than address them. Small problems get tolerated, assumptions go untested, and different versions of the truth sit side by side. Over time, this slows progress and creates frustration. This principle is about being willing to pause and look clearly at what is actually happening, without blame, exaggeration, or avoidance. People often see the same situation differently. Each person holds part of the picture. Progress begins when those perspectives are shared openly.

In practice this means:

- Naming the issue clearly.
- Making sure everyone is talking about the same thing.
- Checking for understanding.
- Checking for agreement.
- Describing what is happening without laying blame.

When an issue feels stuck or repetitive, this simple structure can help teams move from frustration to clarity before jumping to solutions.

### **Principle 2: Be Real in the Conversation**

Many workplace conversations stay polite but never get to the real issue. People say what feels safe rather than what feels true. This often leads to repeated problems. Authenticity is a choice. It means showing up honestly and respectfully instead of hiding behind avoidance.

Before having a difficult conversation with someone else, it helps to pause and reflect:

- What do I really want here?
- Why does this matter?
- What conversation needs to happen?

Clarity with yourself makes it easier to be clear with others.

### **Principle 3: Be Fully Present**

It is possible to be physically present in a meeting but mentally somewhere else. When attention is divided, trust weakens and misunderstandings increase. Most people want to feel heard and understood. Real listening is one of the fastest ways to build trust.

Being fully present means:

- Giving full attention
- Asking genuine questions
- Listening without interrupting
- Avoiding the urge to fix or advise too quickly
- Staying focused on the person speaking

Presence communicates respect.

### **Principle 4: Tackle the Toughest Issue First**

The conversations most often avoided are usually the ones that would make the biggest difference. When difficult issues are left unspoken, they tend to grow. This principle encourages addressing the issue directly and respectfully, rather than working around it.

A simple structure for a challenging conversation:

1. Name the issue clearly.
2. Give a specific example.
3. Explain the impact on work or outcomes.
4. Acknowledge any part played personally.
5. Express a genuine wish to resolve it.
6. Invite the other person's view.
7. Agree what will happen next.

Clear expectations and accountability prevent most workplace tension. Healthy teams include both honest challenge and genuine appreciation.

### **Principle 5: Obey Your Instincts (and Check Them)**

Often there is an early sense that something is not quite right, delay, a tension, a change in behaviour. Ignoring those signals usually makes things harder later. This principle encourages paying attention to instinct, while also checking assumptions before acting on them.

Notice what is being thought but not said. When ready, bring it into the conversation carefully:

“While you were speaking, I had a thought I’d like to check with you...”. This invites dialogue rather than defensiveness. Overly cautious conversations often fail. Honest and respectful ones are more effective.

### **Principle 6: Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake**

Every interaction leaves an emotional impact, positive or negative. Tone, timing and delivery matter just as much as content. Even brief comments can shape how someone feels about their work or contribution.

To create a positive impact:

- Be clear about intent.
- Deliver messages without blame or sarcasm.
- Avoid public criticism.
- Express appreciation regularly.
- Address issues directly rather than withholding.

The aim is to be honest and respectful at the same time.

### **Principle 7: Use Silence Well**

In fast-paced environments, silence can feel uncomfortable. The instinct is often to fill the space quickly. However, silence is one of the most powerful tools in conversation.

After asking a difficult question, pause.

After hearing something important, pause.

Silence allows:

- Reflection
- Emotional regulation
- Deeper thinking
- More balanced responses

This is not silence that avoids issues. It is silence that creates space for better dialogue.

**Enjoy...**