

Conversation Tips (originally shared on coachingforhealth.org during the COVID-19 pandemic; please feel free to use and adapt to your situation)

Coaching individuals with anxiety and mental health difficulties in lockdown

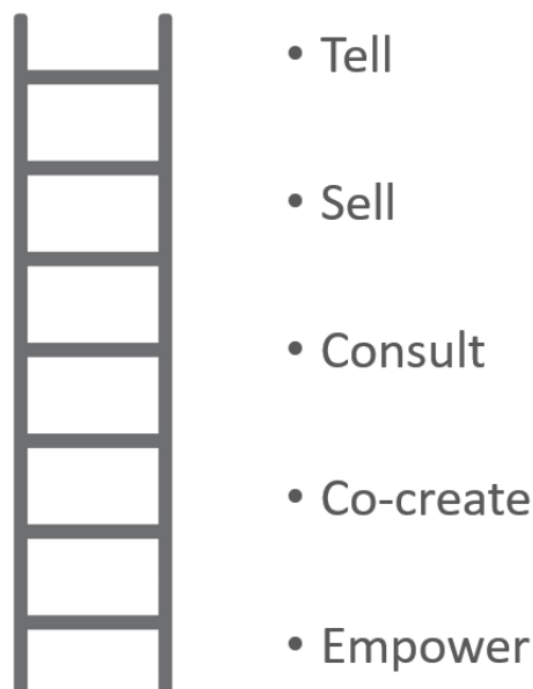
In a previous tip, we've discussed approaches for opening up conversations about mental health and anxiety in this period of lockdown. Here we're going to explore the next stage of the conversation – how to help people think through what they can do about the situation.

A quick recap of how to open the conversation:

- Using open questions and reflecting back to build rapport.
- Asking Non-directive to Directive questions to gain an understanding of an individual's level of insight into their situation, e.g. moving from 'How are things at the moment?' (Non-directive), incrementally up to 'How do you think your feelings have been impacting on you recently?' (Directive).
- Asking permission to have a conversation about how someone's feeling and their situation.
- And if you encounter resistance but still feel a conversation would be helpful, using the Challenge Sandwich to suggest it while remaining Adult-Adult.

The following conversation assumes you have permission to have a conversation about mental health or anxiety. We will use the TGROW coaching framework.

First, it's important to make a decision where to be on the Ladder.



You may want to start at the Consult rung, asking questions for your own insight to assess the situation and make decisions about what to recommend. Here, you're at the Reality stage of TGROW, because we're asking questions about their Reality.

Conversation Tips

You may then want to move down the Ladder to Coach, where we start asking questions to boost their own insight into what they want and what they could do about it. Given that we've established the Topic already, here we'd be in Goal and would then continue on through the rest of the framework.

1. **T** – Topic
2. **G** – Goal
3. **R** – Reality
4. **O** – Options
5. **W** – What next?

Topic

- We've established this by asking permission or challenging if necessary (see above or [here](#) for more detail).

Goal

- We may want to start by eliciting the individual's values in the situation, both to understand what they want and to eventually help build motivation for action.
- You can ask: 'What feels important to you right now, in this situation?' and then: 'What else feels important to you?'
- And keep going until you've got a full list.
- You may end up with more than one goal. It can be helpful to then prioritise and make it SMART (e.g. by asking: 'What do you mean by ____?' to make them more specific).

Reality

- With anxiety and mental health issues, the situation may well feel overwhelming for the individual. It can be useful to ask them about all the barriers they feel are getting

Conversation Tips

in the way of what they want. You can ask: *'What's currently getting in the way of this?'* and *'What else is getting in the way?'*

- Keep going until you get a full list of barriers.
- You can then prioritise them by asking for the one they think it would be best to start with. This can then become the Goal.
- This is a shortened version of the Inner Game coaching method. Please [click here](#) for more detail.

Options

- Once you have the barriers, you can then ask for all their options: ***'What could you do?'***
- If the individual still feels quite anxious or resistant, you may need to caveat the brainstorm by saying something like: ***'These are just ideas, you don't have to do any of them.'***
- Make sure you get a full list.

What Next?

- Having summarised all the Options, you can then ask which they'd like to take forward.
- Try to make sure the new behaviour begins in the next 24-48 hours (even if this involves preparation).
- You can ask about review and accountabilities, also.