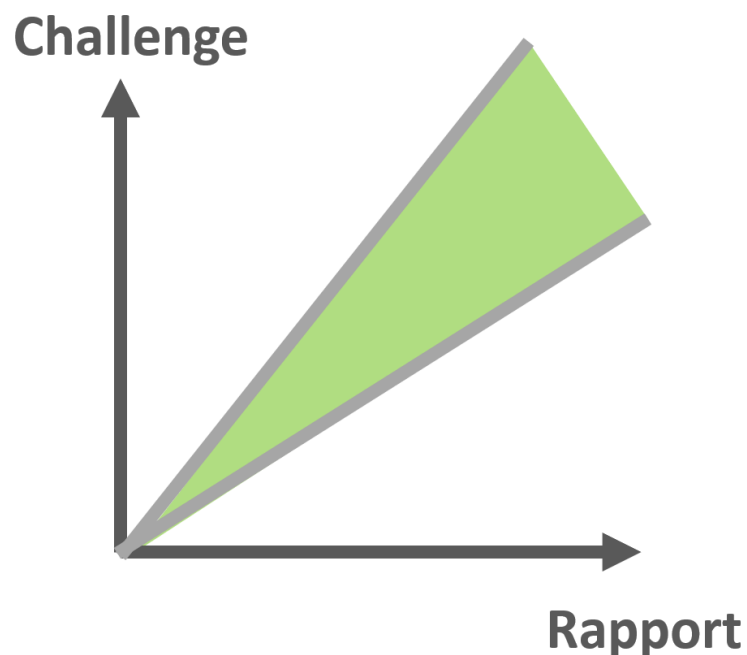


*Conversation Tips (originally shared on [coachingforhealth.org](https://coachingforhealth.org) during the COVID-19 pandemic; please feel free to use and adapt to your situation)*

## **How to work with people seeming to 'put everything on hold' in lockdown**

For many, the experience of lockdown can prompt a great deal of anxiety and may diminish motivation to engage in activities that would benefit their health and wider well-being. Many of these people may consciously or unconsciously choose to 'put things on hold' for the time being, in spite of the potential risks, especially to mental health.

If we need to introduce a Topic like this, first we may need to gauge how likely it is to feel challenging for the individual (i.e. what are their own views on the situation, how much insight do we feel they have, how open are they to have these kinds of conversations, and what might they want to be discussing instead?) If the Topic is likely to feel challenging, then we need to make sure we have sufficient Rapport first to be able to introduce it. This is because the level of Challenge an individual will be open to receiving from us is directly proportional to the level of Rapport we have in the relationship – as described by the Challenge Rapport graph.



To build rapport first, we may need to do some really high-quality active listening, with summarising and reflecting back to make sure the individual feels heard.

As part of our listening, if we feel it would be important to gauge their level of insight into the situation, we can use Non-directive to Directive questioning. This means gradually increasing the level of directiveness of our questions to get more specific on what we want to know, while maintaining rapport. For example:

## Conversation Tips

### Non-directive to Directive questioning:

1. How are you feeling about things at the moment? (lower on the Communication Ladder)
2. How have you been getting on with taking care of yourself?
3. Is there anything that you've found particularly challenging or difficult recently?
4. Do you have any concerns about your health if things persist like this? (higher on the Communication Ladder)

Following our discussion, if we haven't naturally moved into a conversation about the risks of 'putting things on hold', we can **Ask Permission** to discuss it directly.

You may want to summarise what you've been talking about before, and then ask – **'Would you mind if we had a further conversation about how you're managing your health at the moment?'** Or another frame that you'd find more useful.

Hopefully the answer will be 'yes', and if it's 'no', we can still ask permission to explore what's behind the 'no'.

If it is a 'yes', then with the insight we have so far, there are two potential options we may need to choose between:

- A) Motivation is low to self-care
- B) Motivation exists to self-care but it feels impossible

We'll go through them, one at a time:

#### A) Motivation is low to self-care

Here we may need to use the Challenge Sandwich to directly address the issue while maintaining rapport.

##### 1. Set it up

Building rapport through the following stages (you don't need to do all of them):

- Empathise/acknowledge – **'I totally appreciate it's a really difficult time right now'** (here we acknowledge/validate their situation and values – so please adapt to your individual)
- Ask permission - **'Do you mind if I share my perspective on the situation?'** (Here we wait for the 'yes', or some acknowledgement, to make sure the individual has given themselves permission to hear you)
- Shared value - **'Because I really want to make sure we look after your long-term health.'** (Here we're looking for a value that you both/all share, something you all care about)

### 2. Deliver content (your message)

Here we have a choice to use either Subjective Language, or A Rule/Procedure (if it exists). Here it could be Subjective Language (the following are a few examples):

- *'From what I've heard you say, I'm a little concerned that if things were to continue as they are then \_\_\_\_\_ could happen.'*
- *'From my perspective, it would be really important to engage once more in \_\_\_\_\_ to ensure things don't get worse.'*
- *'In my experience, people in similar situations are finding it even more important to look after themselves in these times because \_\_\_\_\_'*

### 3. Check Validity

Checking how this lands with someone:

- *'What do you think?' OR 'What are your thoughts about this?'*

## B) Motivation exists to self-care but it feels impossible

Here we may need to explore the individual's barriers to things happening.

1. You can clarify that it feels important for the individual to re-engage with activities that will help their health and well-being.
2. Then ask them for all the things that are currently getting in the way, i.e. all the barriers.

***'What's getting in the way right now?' and 'What else?'***

You may need to clarify that you're writing a long list and keep asking 'what else?' until they say 'there's nothing else.'

3. Then, having summarised all the barriers, you can ask them:

***'Of these barriers, which of them is the largest, which is the smallest, and which of them do we need to work on first?'***

4. The barrier that they choose to work on first then becomes the Goal for a TGROW which hopefully you can discuss Options around.