

Challenging Conversations -how to have a conversation about a difficult subject well.

A starting point for arts and culture professionals to be bold and provocative in telling unsafe stories.

This document is designed to help arts and culture learning and engagement professionals prepare to work with challenging and difficult subjects. It sits alongside research led by Arts Connect and the Heritage Education Leaders Group which was undertaken by consultants A Merrie Noyse.

Challenging Conversations: Teaching challenging and difficult subjects to children and young people in Galleries, Museums and Heritage Sites.

The Executive Summary and full report can be found on Arts Connect's website by using the following link and expanding the Arts Connect Reports button

<http://www.artsconnect.co.uk/resources/>

What do we mean by a Challenging Conversation?

Challenging conversations are those that can make us feel uncomfortable. In arts and heritage settings these can be conversations around physical and sexual abuse, war, poverty, slavery, illness, discrimination and death. Many of these are present throughout our museums, galleries and heritage sites but the same is true for conversations outside of the workplace and school.

We can all feel nervous about the thought of having a difficult conversation with someone. We may worry about how to start it, about hurting someone's feelings, dealing with people becoming angry or upset and how to close down the conversation at the end without taking ownership of their issue.

We now invite you to explore the:

- Key skills our research shows are important in developing your ability to hold challenging conversations confidently and safely.
- 5-Stage process we have developed to help you support yourself in making those conversations easier.

Skills you need to hold challenging conversations

What is Emotional Intelligence (EQ)?

Emotional Intelligence is a range of personal skills that are separate from general intelligence. They are facets of ourselves that enable us to communicate effectively with others and manage our own feelings and emotions. How much EQ we have will determine how good we are at empathising with others and managing our feelings if upset or challenged.

The Big 5 is a way of understanding different areas of our personality. Each of the 5 dimensions cover an area of personality. Skills on each dimension add up to building overall confidence and self-esteem. This is directly related to how confident you feel in having challenging conversations.

Now, rate yourself on the following dimensions. Use a score of 1 for *least like* and 9 for *most like*:

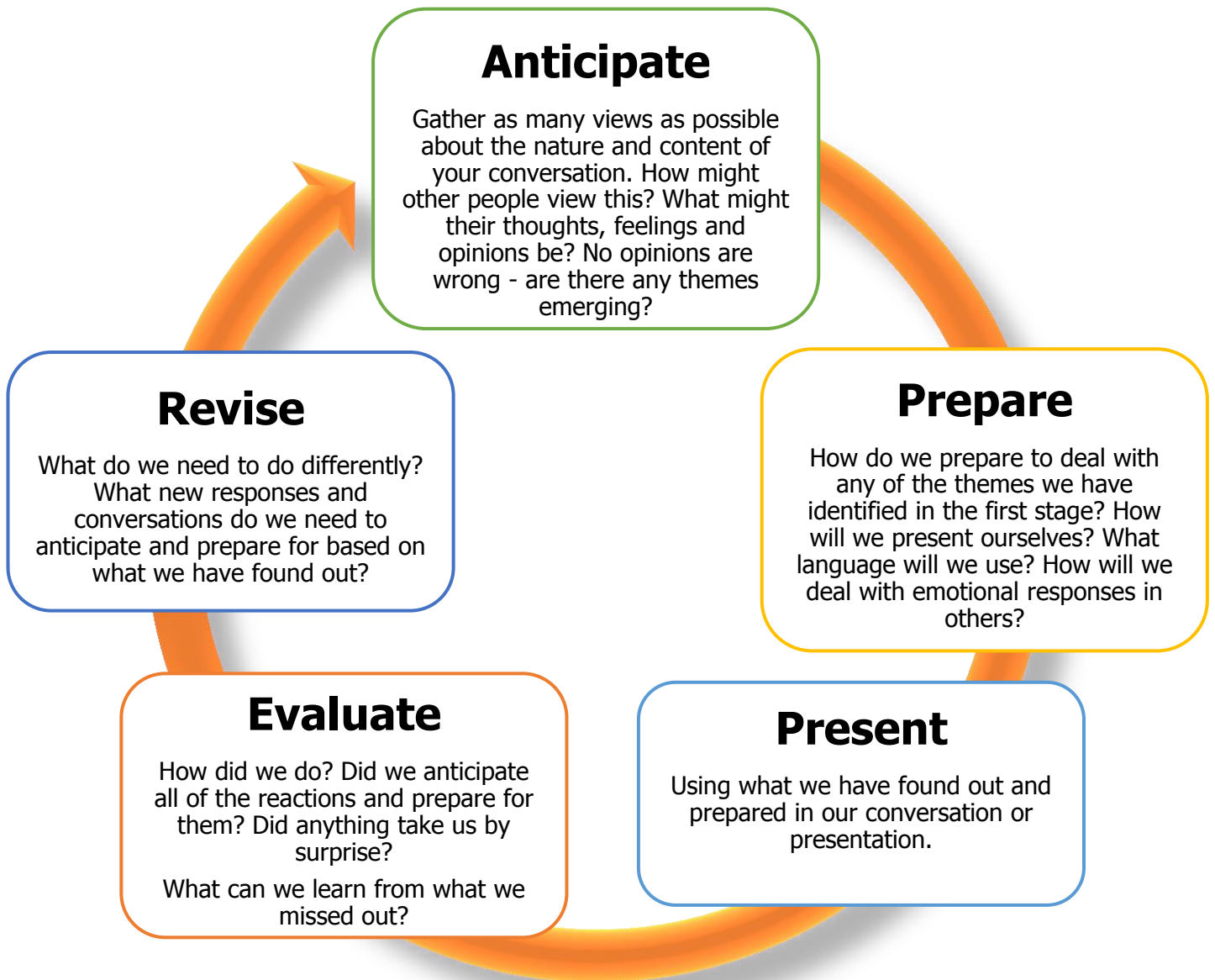
Dimensions: EQ & you	1-9
1. I am quick to recognise emotions and feelings when they are raised in me.	
2. I am good at managing my emotions and feelings.	
3. I am good at staying motivated in difficult situations.	
4. I am quick to notice other people's feelings and emotions.	
5. I am good at handling potentially difficult situations when other people's emotions and feelings cause people to be uncomfortable.	

Dimensions: The Big 5 Personality Skills	1-9
1. I can consider my level of open-mindedness on a scale 1-9 to be...	
2. I feel my level of conscientiousness on a level 1-9 is...	
3. My confidence in delivering sensitive or controversial information is on a scale of 1-9...	
4. I am agreeable to other people.	
5. I am good at managing worries, anxieties or fears.	

If you have a score of 6 or above on each of these dimensions, you are more likely to be able to use your skills to hold a challenging or sensitive conversation with others. How did you do?

Do not worry if your scores are lower. You can use the following process to help you develop the skills you need to hold challenging and sensitive conversations, regardless of the subject. One simple way of raising your scores on all the dimensions is to **reflect** on the dimensions in your everyday practice. Learning the dimensions and applying them for yourself whilst noticing the skills of others can automatically help you to become more skilled. We learn best by seeing and doing.

Anticipate – Prepare – Present – Evaluate – Revise



How can you apply this to the development of a project exploring a challenging subject?

National Trust Croome worked closely with A Merrie Noyse in developing the ***Anticipate, Prepare, Present, Evaluate and Review*** model. Here are their findings:

Anticipate:

Gather as many facts as possible.

What are the emerging themes and voices? Who isn't represented? Why?

How prepared are you and your organisation? What are the thoughts, feelings, counter arguments?

Tool up! Who or what do you need to do this work, seek advice, guidance, thoughts and feelings from your wider team/organisation?

Prepare:

What's your artistic/curatorial stance, who is the lead voice, why? Who can help you to make that decision, what partners can help?

Do you have the right people in the project to help your decision making?

How do you assess the gaps in your knowledge/experience?

Think local, regional, national and international; what are the risks and opportunities - how do you ensure you are a responsible platform?

Present:

What's your message? Purpose? Values? Tone?

Test your ideas, have a strong process that involves people connected to the story and your organisation - have a clear shared process for decision making.

Be authentic, responsible and connected.

Evaluate:

Embed evaluation from the start; ensure you have an iterative process.

Test and evaluate ideas, thoughts, feelings, facts, processes & procedures.

Ensure your project is agile enough to respond positively to feedback.

Get feedback from as many places as possible.

Revise:

How can your iterative process remain strong and supportive?

What do need to do differently? Do more of?

What new information, conversations, and ideas do you need to anticipate and prepare for?

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