

# Difficult Conversation Guide

## Practical Conversation Starters for Challenging Student Situations

### School Counselor Resource Series

### Purpose

Some conversations are harder than others. This guide provides open-ended questions to help school counselors create a safe, supportive environment where students can share their thoughts and feelings. Use these prompts flexibly and adapt them to the student's age, developmental level, and unique circumstances.

## Anxiety & Stress

- What has been feeling especially stressful lately?
- When do you notice those feelings the most?
- What usually helps, even a little?
- What feels within your control right now?
- What would make today feel just a little easier?

## Sadness & Grief

- Can you tell me what's been weighing on your heart?
- What has been the hardest part?
- What do you miss the most?
- Who has been supportive during this time?
- What helps you feel connected when you're having a difficult day?

Freedom **Path** Counseling

1431 Riverside Pkwy, Suite A | Lawrenceville, GA | 30043 | 678-765-9291  
[www.freedompathcounseling.org](http://www.freedompathcounseling.org) | [info@freedompathcounseling.org](mailto:info@freedompathcounseling.org)

# Anger & Frustration

- What happened before you started feeling angry?
- What do you wish people understood about what happened?
- How did your body let you know you were getting upset?
- What has helped you calm down in the past?
- What would you like to do differently next time?

# Peer Relationships & Bullying

- Tell me what has been happening.
- How has this affected your day at school?
- Who do you feel safe talking to?
- When do you feel most accepted?
- What support would be most helpful right now?

# Family Changes

- What changes have you noticed at home?
- How have those changes affected you?
- What has helped you adjust?
- Who do you talk to when things feel difficult?
- What do you wish adults knew about what you're experiencing?

# Academic Concerns

- Which part of school feels most challenging right now?

Freedom **Path** Counseling

1431 Riverside Pkwy, Suite A | Lawrenceville, GA | 30043 | 678-765-9291  
www.freedompathcounseling.org | info@freedompathcounseling.org

- When do you feel most successful?
- What gets in the way of learning?
- What support has been helpful before?
- What's one goal you'd like to work toward?

## Social Withdrawal

- I've noticed you've seemed quieter lately. How have things been?
- When do you feel most like yourself?
- Is there anything making it difficult to connect with others?
- Who do you enjoy spending time with?
- What would help you feel more connected?

## Closing the Conversation

Before ending the meeting, consider asking:

- What was most helpful about today's conversation?
- What is one thing you'll take away from today?
- What support do you need before we meet again?
- What's one small step you feel ready to take?

## Gentle Reminders

- Lead with curiosity, not assumptions.
- Listen more than you speak.
- Validate emotions before exploring solutions.

Freedom **Path** Counseling

1431 Riverside Pkwy, Suite A | Lawrenceville, GA | 30043 | 678-765-9291  
[www.freedompathcounseling.org](http://www.freedompathcounseling.org) | [info@freedompathcounseling.org](mailto:info@freedompathcounseling.org)

- Look for strengths alongside concerns.
- Leave students with hope and a clear next step whenever possible.

*Part of the Freedom Path Counseling School Counselor Resource Series*

These resources are provided free of charge to support school counselors as they invest in the emotional well-being of students and families. Learn more and access additional downloadable tools at **[freedompathcounseling.org/school-counselor-resource-center](https://freedompathcounseling.org/school-counselor-resource-center)**

Freedom **Path** Counseling

1431 Riverside Pkwy, Suite A | Lawrenceville, GA | 30043 | 678-765-9291  
[www.freedompathcounseling.org](https://www.freedompathcounseling.org) | [info@freedompathcounseling.org](mailto:info@freedompathcounseling.org)