

How to deliver bad news

Three steps for delivering bad news

1 Sharing the news

Be straightforward, honest, and respectful when delivering the message. Provide one or two key reasons to support your point without overloading with details.

2 Handling reactions

Show empathy and acknowledge their feelings. Clearly state that the decision is final and cannot be changed.

3 Exploring solutions or next steps

Confirm if the person is ready to discuss next steps or arrange a follow-up if needed.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- Trying too hard to make the conversation end on a positive note.
- Postponing the bad news with unnecessary small talk.
- Being vague or indirect, using overly complex language, or sugarcoating.
- Asking leading questions to make them agree (e.g., "Don't you think...?").
- Downplaying the news or making dismissive remarks (e.g., "You'll see this is for the best").
- Shifting blame onto others (e.g., "This wasn't my decision").

Reactions to Bad News

- Denial
- Anger or frustration
- Bargaining or negotiation
- Sadness and despair
- Acceptance