

The Pressure of Delivering Bad News

9 tips and strategies on how to deliver bad news to anyone

“Hey, I have something to tell you...”

We’ve all had to be the deliverer of bad news, and it’s not easy. It can be quite awful, actually. And if you haven’t been in this situation, lucky you — but one day, you may be, and you should be prepared to give it the best way possible.

Whether you’re a leader, best friend, spouse, coach, or sibling; here are a few tips and strategies on how to deliver bad news to anyone.

1. Be prepared

Easier said than done. You may not have the time, but if you do, take advantage.

If you’re prepared, you are more than likely to remember everything you are prepared to say and will do so more composedly and logically.

The most important matter is that the receiving party knows everything. If you are prepared, you’ll be able to divulge all the needed information.

2. Make eye contact

It shows respect, attention, and interest in what is being said.

Making eye contact will give the impression that you are fully present, genuinely care, and can confidently present the news.

3. Leave bad news to bad news

In the pressure of delivering the bad news, you may be tempted to disguise it as something good or frame it in a way that will make them feel it's not as bad as they may think.

This will make you come across as inconsiderate. Give the news with honesty and grace. Be empathic and understanding that they may be hurt, but don't lie or mask the truth.

4. Meet them where they are

Speak at a level of understanding that the person will receive. Don't speak to an adult as you would to a child.

Sharing bad news above or below a person's level of understanding could make it seem like you don't care enough to take the time to speak in a proper manner.

5. Use facts and rationale

If applicable, provide facts and evidence for why something happened or went wrong. You want to inform them as best as possible. They may not agree or like it, but show them the dignity of why the decision was made to give them a better understanding.

If something can be done about the situation, at least that person will have the knowledge and ability to proceed from there.

6. Open the floor up

You've probably done most of the talking. Open the floor up so they can speak their mind. Whether good or bad, this may be good for them in the present and the future.

7. Stand your ground but show empathy

Stand firm in your assessment of the situation and give honest feedback. Don't give false hope.

You may receive harsh feedback in return, don't be defensive but understand their feelings in the present moment.

8. Suggest solutions

If the situation can be mended, let them know. Nothing wrong with being optimistic. Offer your help, and give hope and confidence toward the future.

9. A check-in can go a long way

This should be a two-way dialogue. They may not have something to say at that very moment, but they might in a few days or weeks. Check in to see how they are doing.

Give them time to process, respond, and put yourself in their shoes. There may be a chance you may want a check-in as well if you were them.

Here is a quick recap on how to deliver news to anyone:

1. Be prepared
2. Make eye contact
3. Leave bad news to bad news
4. Meet them where they are
5. Use facts and rationale
6. Open the floor up
7. Stand your ground but show empathy
8. Suggest solutions
9. A check-in can go a long way