

# 'ESCAPE':

## The 6 Stage Protocol for Delivering Bad News

### **E**ducate

Know your **FACTS!** what has happened, why has it happened, what will or might go on to happen? Are there any legal or HR policies affecting the situation and/or your announcement of the situation?

### **S**et-up

Plan **HOW, WHEN, WHERE** and with **WHO** you will make the announcement.

Consider the physicality of the space, the location, and timings. Make it comfortable but not so informal it appears you are not taking it seriously. Make sure there is privacy, and only those who need to be there are there.

Consider how people will be invited to a meeting (if necessary) and how much will the invitation tell them about what is happening or about to happen?

### **C**ontain

**TAKE A LEAD** of the meeting at the very start. Welcome, settle and ensure everyone is comfortable using warm and welcoming tones whilst retaining a sense of seriousness and an air of necessity. Once ready, use a strong, short pre-disclosure statement which gives those listening a couple of seconds to psychologically 'prepare' for the bad news.

Examples include; *"I have some difficult news to share with you"*, *"we are concerned that..."*, *"I wanted to meet with you today to let you know the results of the xxx were not as good as we had hoped"*.

### **A**nnounce

Make the announcement. Do not beat around the bush, deliver the **FACTS** in a **TRUTHFUL** manner. Maintain as much eye contact as possible and be sincere. The actual announcement is the shortest part of the protocol.

### **P**rocess

The processing stage is about handing the space over to the person/people you have disclosed the news to. Let it land, allow for a moment of reflective space.

If no one speaks wait until it feels right and then use empathic enquiry eg, *"I appreciate what I have just said was not what you wanted to hear, and I'm wondering what you are thinking?"*.

If people are quick to speak use effective listening skills and let them speak.

**DO NOT:** try to change anyone's opinion, interrupt, or shift blame.

Your difficult task in 'processing' is to strike a balance between being open and accepting of all the thoughts and feelings that come up, whilst containing the space to not allow the expression to go on too long and not expect a result / conclusion / action at the end of the discussion - tricky!!

### **E**xit

Lead the meeting around to an end. **SUMMARISE** what has been said and what will happen next. **SIGNPOST** to further support and let them know how they can contact you or other relevant individuals for follow up discussions and questions as and when they come up. Do not attempt to discuss other matters as part of the meeting. Close the meeting with no 'lingering'