Conflict-related or unexpected issues that present a challenge can arise during annual employee reviews. The purpose of this guide is to give you a few hints on how to successfully handle difficult situations such as these. Under „Contact Persons“ on the homepage, you’ll find a list of contact persons you can involve in difficult situations: www.uni-goettingen.de/jahresgespraech

A CONFLICT: WHAT TO DO...

- **If you are aware of conflicts / difficult topics in advance**: Make arrangements to have a separate conflict discussion or consultation independent of the employee review.

- **When conflicts or difficulties arise during a review**: First try to diffuse the situation applying the principles of a “one-on-one discussion”; consider all positions and interests, develop joint solution options. Goal: To provide a constructive, open forum; not to avoid difficult issues, but to reach a mutually acceptable solution.

- **If this goal cannot be achieved because the conflict proves to be unsolvable at the present time**: Break off the conversation; agree on a future date for an additional meeting with the involvement of a neutral third person or the next higher superior.

HOW SHOULD YOU ACT?

- **Separate the „person“ from the „problem“**: Stay objective; address statements directly to the problem, not the person.
  
  **Example**: „Communication with your colleagues has led to a few misunderstandings. What would be most expedient to find common ground?” instead of “Your communication skills are inadequate and this has caused problems when working with colleagues.”

- **Personal appreciation and confidence building** (e.g. call attention to the employee’s past achievements).

- **Focus on the future, not on the past.** Problem-solving should come from both sides (both the employee and the supervisor).

- **Show understanding and empathy**: however, don’t shy away from openly and honestly expressing opinions.

- **Do not allow yourself to be provoked**, remain objective, do not tolerate insults.

- **Listen actively, accept displays of emotion**. If necessary, wait until the employee has calmed down before continuing with the conversation.

- **When addressing addiction, sexual harassment or bullying**: Draw attention to counselling possibilities, offer the opportunity to have another conversation.
HOW SHOULD YOU RESPOND WHEN...

- **Your conversation partner breaks out in tears:**
  Don’t panic! Offer her/him a handkerchief. Wait until the employee has calmed down a bit and ask what caused the outburst of emotion.

- **You find yourself in a dispute situation with your conversation partner:**
  Try to remain objective and suggest breaking off the conversation and continuing at a later date. Both parties should think about the conflict and consider getting a third person involved in the next meeting.

- **Your conversation partner becomes demanding:**
  Stay calm and matter-of-fact, explain to her/him that you need time to consider the situation. Do not make any promises that you cannot keep.

- **Your conversation partner becomes offensive:**
  Avoid insults and show your conversation partner that you will not tolerate any offensive remarks. If the insults get out of hand, break off the conversation and continue at a later date with a third party.

- **Your conversation partner has bad things to say about colleagues or attempts to involve you in a conflict between colleagues or attempts to involve you in a conflict between colleagues:**
  Do not take a stance or express any opinion regarding a conflict or any person involved! If necessary, arrange a talk involving all parties.