



## Tips for Difficult Conversations – COVID-19

As MIT plans for increasing research operations, many people will face difficult situations in relation to returning physically to campus. The challenges may include individual health risks, access to childcare, and limited commuting options, among others. Even with measures including social distancing, use of face masks and viral testing, returning to campus may not currently be possible for some people.

The following are some considerations for raising concerns you may have for yourself or others:

### General

- Do not assume that your supervisor knows your personal circumstances or individual concerns without you sharing them explicitly.
- You do not have to divulge any personal medical information to your supervisor.
- Your supervisor should have received the message from the Institute that currently in-person work on campus is voluntary.
- Your supervisor may be surprised by your concerns; especially during this time, people may prioritize needs and assess risk differently.
- This situation is very emotionally charged for many people. Preparing for a conversation can help you manage your own emotions and anticipate emotional responses from others.
- The conversation may be difficult, but important to have in a respectful and constructive way to ensure a positive relationship.

### Planning the conversation

- Outline your objectives. Make a short list of points you want your supervisor to understand at the end of the conversation. These can guide you to keep the conversation focused.
- Consider timing and the best medium (Zoom, phone, in writing, etc.) to have the conversation.
- Share information about what you need in these circumstances.
- Express your perspective without attacking the other person; cite common goals
- Signal willingness to hear the other person's perspective; acknowledge their opinion.
- Make sure you both feel heard: summarize what the other has said and confirm your understandings.
- Avoid discussing solutions/alternatives until there is a shared understanding of the problem.
- Share your motivation and commitment to working together.

### Resources

- The Ombuds Office can help you plan for a challenging conversation. Please feel free to call 617-253-5921 to schedule a confidential conversation.
- Others within your department, including your HR representative, Administrative Officer and Department Head, can serve as resources to help you address concerns.
- MIT's COVID-19 Info Center – [covid19.mit.edu](https://covid19.mit.edu)
- MIT Medical Updates – [medical.mit.edu/covid19-updates](https://medical.mit.edu/covid19-updates)