The dental team comprises a variety of dental professionals. When teams have collaborative conversations to solve workplace issues, they can produce new ideas and innovative solutions that meet or even surpass business objectives, improve workplace satisfaction and staff relationships, and ultimately benefit client care.

CDHA has developed a video series titled Conversations to Build Collaborative Workplaces. The AARCH conversation framework outlined in the videos will guide dental hygienists who are seeking to bridge a divide with a member on their dental team, both in the short term when the COVID-19 pandemic subsides and in the future. Please watch the Introductory Video: Developing Your Mindset for more detailed information.

Here are some key elements to consider prior to having a collaborative conversation.

**The Best Time to Have a Conversation**
The timing of your conversation is important. The morning is ideal as we are rested, we think more clearly, and we have more control over our emotions. If the conversation happens in the afternoon or at the end of a workday, pause for 5 or 10 minutes to refocus, to grab a cup of tea or to take a quick walk around the block. Do ask the other person when they are able to have a conversation. Be mindful of the other person’s needs as well.

**Non-Verbal Communication**
Your body language must be aligned with your words. If your body language does not reflect your message, people will notice. Unfold your arms, put weight on both feet, assume a natural stance, soften your facial expression, and smile. Nod occasionally to acknowledge you are engaged in the conversation.

**Pace of Conversation**
Speaking at a normal pace in a calm, reassuring tone shows confidence. If necessary, take a deep breath to slow down the pace of your words.

**Word Choice**
Try not to overly script your conversation. Scripts take away authenticity and opportunities for connection. Apply the AARCH framework and be yourself while having the conversation. Focus on communicating the right message and hearing what the other person is saying.
Mindset
You want to approach the conversation with a strong, confident, non-judgmental, and respectful mindset. The following three factors contribute to a strong and positive mindset:

1. **Knowing that you have choices.** When you recognize that there may be more than one option or solution, you can have some control over the outcome and feel more confident in your shared decision making.

2. **Acknowledging your beliefs and those of others.** Even though you may not agree with someone else’s beliefs or perspectives, being aware that such differences exist will allow you to approach a conversation more openly.

3. **Being in the “Flow” rather than the “Muddy Bank.”** Ask yourself if you are in the Flow (experiencing positive emotions) or in the Mud (experiencing negative emotions). You are responsible for your happiness. Approach a conversation when you are in the Flow.

How can you move from the Mud to the Flow? Try some of these activities:

- meditating (with a guide)
- exercising
- listening to music
- reading inspirational quotes
- keeping a gratitude journal
- speaking with family and friends (the inner circle)

The Conversation
Before applying the AARCH framework, remember to explore the team member’s perspective first. Let your team member know the subject of the conversation and ask them how they feel about it. Listen non-defensively, be aware of your body language, and remember you are listening to gather information, not to formulate your answer. This step will provide you with an understanding of your team member’s position on the subject.

The **AARCH** framework will guide you through the conversation:

- **Affirm and Acknowledge:** Affirm the person’s position on the subject. Acknowledge something positive about them either as individuals or their work.

- **Agreement:** Find areas of agreement on the topic. Remember to connect the agreement piece and the resolution piece with “and” not “but.”

- **Resolution:** Present your ideas on how to solve the problem and ask for their ideas. This is the negotiation piece, which should lead to a resolution.

- **Confirmation:** Confirm who is going to do what and when specifically.

- **Hope:** Wrap up the conversation expressing gratitude and optimism.

Collaborative conversations in the workplace can be challenging and take practice. Planning a time to have the conversation (when possible), being aware of your non-verbal communication, having a positive mindset before the conversation, and using the AARCH framework during the conversation will help you feel confident in achieving the desired outcome.