

BETTER WORDS WORDS TO USE

a sampling from the book *Communicate to Connect*
based on tips from the daily Relationship Tips



Using positive language has a profound impact on both yourself and those you communicate with. It reflects a constructive mindset and fosters a supportive atmosphere. Personally, positive framing enhances self-confidence and motivation, enabling you to approach challenges with optimism and resilience. It directs your focus towards solutions, empowering more effective navigation of situations.

Similarly, using positive language with others shows respect and empathy, acknowledging strengths and fostering trust. It inspires collaboration and mutual understanding, encouraging open dialogue and joint exploration of solutions. Ultimately, integrating positive language cultivates a culture of growth and positivity, benefiting personal development and enhancing interpersonal relationships.

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WORDS TO USE

"I SEE IT DIFFERENTLY."

There are times when each of you will view a situation from your individual perspectives. Sometimes, it is not important enough to even bring it up. If you feel that you want to talk about it, it is better to use the phrase "I see it differently..." rather than "I disagree".

Essentially, they are saying the same thing. But "disagreeing" has stronger negative connotations and may trigger defensiveness, dismissing your view, or even hostility. Adding the word, "I respectfully disagree" or "I somewhat disagree" still has the word 'disagree' with all its connotations.

Other ways of saying "I see it differently...": "I have a different point of view", "I have a different experience with that", "The way I see it ..."

WORDS TO USE

"WHAT ELSE COULD THIS MEAN?"

Or, "I'm wondering if there is another way of looking at this."
When someone interprets your words or actions, instead of retorting with "You got it all wrong", you can ask this question.*

The idea is that there are so many possible explanations for something that was done or said. Too often, people interpret things in the worst possible way. This leads to more upset than the situation warrants.

This question type of question opens up the possibilities of what might have been happening or the intention.

(You can ask yourself the same question when you are upset about something that happened or was said. Come up with at least two answers. Even if you don't believe your answers, this still gives you a little space before getting upset or blasting out.)

* It is best if you discuss this model as a tool in your marriage toolbox. Establish together that you will ask each other this question when one is upset about something. You might add that you come up with at least two or three possibilities before actually addressing the situation.

WORDS TO USE

"CAN WE TRY THIS..."

When you are trying to introduce a new way of doing things, don't impose your ideas. Rather, bring your spouse on board in the decision-making. Or at the very least, ask them if they are willing to go along with your idea.

"I have an issue... can we try something to help with that?" "This is not working well for me, can we try something different?" "This is what I am thinking ... can we try this?" "What do you think? Will that work?" "How does that sound to you?"

WORDS TO USE

"SORRY, THAT DIDN'T COME OUT RIGHT."

Sometimes, our words just don't come out as intended. Rather than just hoping that the other person won't notice or will receive your message despite the wording, admit it. "Sorry, that didn't come out right." "That is not what I meant to say." "That came out wrong."

Then continue, "Let me try that again." "Let me rephrase it." The words "Let me..." signal to the listener that you understand that you're asking for their patience as you reframe your thoughts.

As necessary, take the time to gather your words before restating your original thoughts in different words.

WORDS TO USE

"HOW MIGHT WE..."

These words "How. Might. We." frame a solution-seeking mindset.

HOW. This sets the tone that we believe the solution is out there, but we don't have the correct answer yet, so we should explore. This provides creative confidence.

MIGHT. This gives the framework that you are not absolutely expected to have a winning idea – it may or may not work and it's totally ok.

WE. A reminder that it's about teamwork and working collaboratively. There's no "I" here, only "We" – not 'my idea' or 'your idea'.

WORDS TO USE

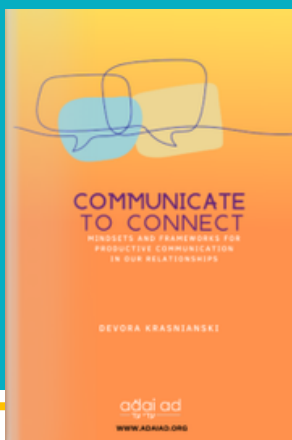
"DO YOU WANT ME TO FIX IT OR FEEL IT?"

When your spouse is talking about a problem, ask what they want from the conversation – to vent or a solution.

Don't share possible solutions when all they want is a listening ear.

If you are the one who is sharing, say what you want from the conversation.

"I just need to vent." "I'm feeling awful about this; I need a hug." "I need to know that I'll be all right." "I'm asking for your insight about this." "Please help me make sense of what happened."



WORDS TO AVOID

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Words have immense power in shaping our thoughts and guiding our actions. The language we use in our internal dialogue and in our conversations with others profoundly influences how we perceive situations and interact with the world around us.

Disempowering words and phrases can erect mental barriers that hinder our ability to communicate effectively and find solutions to challenges. By maintaining awareness of these linguistic pitfalls, we can actively avoid using negative or dismissive language. Instead, we can intentionally reframe our thoughts and expressions to be more constructive, positive, and empowering.

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WORDS TO AVOID

"EVERYBODY SAYS THAT YOU ..."

"Everybody says that you ... are crazy." "Everybody says that you are wrong here." Or worse, "Nobody else does that."

Think about why you use this phrase or tactic. Might it be that you are (subconsciously) trying to bully the other person?

If you are upset about something, talk about it with respect – without bringing other people into the conversation.

(And, btw, how do you know that everybody thinks or says that?)

WORDS TO AVOID

"YOU DON'T WANT TO GO THERE."

This phrase is deflective and shuts down the conversation. It dismisses the other person's interest or concern without addressing the topic, effectively preventing further discussion. This can stifle open communication, leaving the other person feeling unheard and disregarded. When said with a sinister tone, it can come across as highly controlling.

When you feel like saying this (or something similar), it is worth reflecting on why you don't want to have that conversation or what about what they brought up is so triggering.

If you genuinely feel that it is not in the best interest of the other person to talk about the topic, you might say, "I'm concerned that discussing this further might be upsetting. Can we approach this another time or talk about something else?" This approach is more respectful and considerate of the other person's feelings.

WORDS TO AVOID

"WHO IS RIGHT HERE?"

These words are usually said when there is a conflict and the speaker thinks that they are right and the other is wrong.

The thing is: just because the other person has a different perspective, it doesn't mean that it is wrong. It's just different, not necessarily wrong. Instead, look to resolve the conflict.

Additionally, when this question is asked to others, you are asking someone to get involved in your conflict. Don't do that to others. Or to your relationship.

WORDS TO AVOID

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, THAT NEVER HAPPENED."

The phrase dismisses the other person's experience, potentially invalidating their feelings and perceptions of what happened. In fact, this can be gaslighting, a manipulation tactic used to make someone doubt their own memories or perception of reality.

If indeed you have a different perception of the event, you can be curious about why the other person sees it or remembers the event that way.

For example, you could say, "Hmm, I have a different recollection of what happened. Tell me how you see it, and then I'll share it from my point of view." This approach fosters open communication and mutual understanding.

WORDS TO AVOID

"THIS CONVERSATION IS OVER."

This phrase is controlling because it abruptly ends the discussion without allowing the other person to be heard or reach a resolution. It can leave the other person feeling dismissed and frustrated, hindering effective communication.

Ending a conversation in this way can escalate tensions and create a sense of invalidation for the other person's thoughts or feelings. Instead, fostering open communication involves actively listening, acknowledging the other person's viewpoint, and striving for mutual understanding, even if the topic is uncomfortable or challenging.

When navigating difficult discussions, being mindful of your emotional reactions and triggers can help maintain constructive dialogue. If emotions are running high or there are time constraints, finding a respectful way to pause the conversation and revisit it later demonstrates consideration for both parties' perspectives and promotes healthier communication patterns. For instance, if you find yourself going around in circles or need to wrap it up due to practical reasons (such as it being late or having a prior commitment), you might say, "This seems important to you. I have to [whatever], let's come back to it [whenever]."

This approach shows respect for the conversation and the other person's feelings, while also acknowledging practical constraints.

WORDS TO AVOID

"I HAVE TO.."

"I have to..." implies obligation or burden, framing tasks or responsibilities negatively. By shifting to "I get to..." instead, we reframe our thinking to focus on opportunity and gratitude. This simple change can foster a more positive outlook and appreciation for the tasks or activities we engage in. It transforms everyday actions into meaningful opportunities to learn, grow, or contribute.

Choosing "I get to..." over "I have to..." encourages a mindset of empowerment and choice. It reminds us that many responsibilities and activities are privileges rather than burdens. This shift in language encourages a proactive approach to our responsibilities, enhancing motivation and satisfaction in our daily lives. Embracing "I get to..." cultivates a sense of agency and gratitude, promoting a more positive and fulfilling outlook on our personal and professional endeavors.

WORDS TO AVOID

"WHY CAN'T YOU JUST..."

The implication is that "there's something wrong with you and I can't believe that you do things like you do."

Don't say things like "Why can't you just be normal?" "Why can't you just do it already?" "Why can't you just listen to me?"

These words are usually said out of frustration. When you are frustrated, stop and reflect, "What is going on for me, why is this action/inaction making me feel this way?" Once you figure out what is going on for you, that's what you will want to communicate instead.

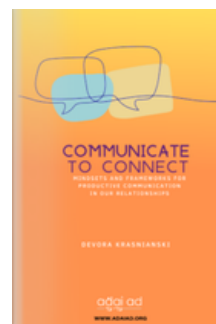
WORDS TO AVOID

"YOU JUST NEED TO BE MORE [UNDERSTANDING, POSITIVE]."

"You just need to be more [understanding, positive, forgiving]" is diminishing because it tells someone how they should feel or act. It can make the person feel like their emotions or actions aren't valid. It's especially dismissive when it's used to justify your own actions.

Of course, in a healthy relationship, spouses can gently guide each other to growth, but this depends on the context of the relationship and the setting in which it's brought up. It's important to approach these situations with empathy, respecting the other person's feelings and viewpoints without imposing your own judgments or expectations. "I've noticed that sometimes when we're dealing with [specific situation], it might help if we approach it with a bit more understanding and positivity. What do you think about us trying that?"

This approach invites a collaborative discussion and acknowledges the other person's perspective, fostering open communication and mutual respect in the relationship.



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