

PEACEFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT A CONFLICT

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



HAVE A SPOUSE? YOU WILL HAVE CONFLICT. IT'S INEVITABLE.

Conflicts are a natural part of the human experience. They arise because individuals have unique perspectives and ways of seeing the world. The goal isn't to eliminate conflicts but to manage them through healthy mindsets and tools. Recognize that conflicts are inevitable; you will see things differently from others.

Healthy disagreements lead to eye-opening discussions, personal growth, and potentially closer relationships. In a healthy disagreement, people learn, explore, and challenge each other's thinking, widening their horizons with curiosity, open-mindedness, and respect.

By working through conflicts together, you'll feel closer to those around you and gain a better understanding of what matters to them and how they prefer to work. Differences in ideas and approaches are natural and expected in any relationship.

Happy couples, for example, are comfortable with conflicts. They feel safe sharing their perspectives and discussing issues without fighting, avoiding explosions or power struggles. They are secure enough to be influenced by each other's viewpoints.

A lack of conflicts may indicate a lack of truthfulness and emotional safety, leading to eroded trust and built-up resentment, which strain and destabilize the relationship. It's all about how you deal with conflict that matters.



“THE KEY TO FIXING A BIG PROBLEM IS TO SELECT THE RIGHT TOOLS.”

The right tools, words and mindsets are critical when having difficult conversations around areas of conflict. Here, we share some basics of such conversations. These are based on tips from the daily Relationship Tips from AdaiAd.

We share a formula, or script, that can help you plan and move through the conversation. Using a script compels you to reflect and choose your words more carefully. It also forces you to slow down your thinking during the conversation. In the beginning, such scripts feel awkward and stilted. Very quickly, you will integrate these wordings into your couple conversations.

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PEACEFUL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT A CONFLICT

When you have a conversation around a conflict, it is worthwhile to follow a script such as this one. Below are the 5 components of the script. Even more important than your words is your mindset about the conflict and the conversation.

OWN THE PROBLEM

The owner of a problem is the person most affected, upset, or discontent. Owning a problem does not mean being at fault or being the only one that participates in a solution. However, the push for getting things changed must come from the actual owner of the problem.

“I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)?”

“There is something on my mind. Is now a good time to talk?”

DESCRIBE THE ISSUE

Describe the issue in terms of the *core value* that is important to you and the *specific behavior* that is frustrating you.

“[The core value] is important to me. When [the behavior you experienced]...” →

“Feeling safe and secure is something I lacked when I was a child, when you say you are coming home at X:00 and it is two hours later and you are still not home ...” →

SHARE WHAT GOES ON FOR YOU WHEN THIS HAPPENS

Describe how this *impacts* you and your related *emotions*. Share your perspective of the situation.

“...What happened for me was [impact]. And this makes me feel ... [emotion].” →

“...I sat with my phone in hand because was so worried about you...” →

PROPOSE A REASONABLE FIX

Suggest a change that is attainable. Be prepared for a conversation/ negotiation to find a mutually agreeable change.

“...If you would ... [proposal]...” →

“...If you would call me to tell me that you will be late, ...” →

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL RESPOND

Describe how your life will be positively impacted by the change. This may be a compromise, support, expression of appreciation. Note: Generally, this is not a ‘reward’ for their action.

“...I will ... [your response].”

“... I will be so much more relaxed. I won't have these frustrations and questions to dump on you when you come home.”

OWN THE PROBLEM

WHY THIS WORKS

When you own the problem, you take it upon yourself to find a mutually agreeable solution, and you won't use the problem as an impetus for complaining or bashing. You are admitting to yourself and the other that it is you who is having an issue with something.

Starting the conversation by asking permission to bring it up invites them to be a participant in the process and by having them say yes to that question they are now part of it and they likely will own it more; you will gain their agreement and lower resistance.

TO CONSIDER

Take responsibility by using 'I' statements. The more general 'we' dilutes responsibility.

Ask permission before starting the conversation. They may be busy and their head, maybe in a different space. You want to make sure that they really are able to listen to what you are bringing up. Be ready for them to decline your request; you can bring it back up at another point.

POSSIBLE WORDING

"I need your help with something. Can we talk about it (soon)?"

"There is something on my mind. Is now a good time to talk?"

"I really appreciate your point of view. I hope you will be willing to listen to my experience as we decide how we might best address this challenge. Can we do that?"

"I know we're not on the same page, but I want to be... When is a good time to talk?"

DESCRIBE THE ISSUE

WHY THIS WORKS

By identifying the underlying value, you are getting to core about what bothers you about the situation. There is an underlying need or value that is not being met. This can help you frame the situation.

TO CONSIDER

When describing the behavior, stick to objective facts, not your interpretation of what happened. (ex: not “you were late”, rather, “you told me that you’d be home at 7:00 and you came home at 9:00.”)

Do not guess at their intention or reasons. (ex: not “because you really don’t care what happens around here.”)

Stick to one incident, do not bring out a litany of complaints, even if it is a pattern.

POSSIBLE WORDING

[Value] is important to me

When [the behavior you experienced]

“[Honesty / timeliness / reputation/ security/ openmindedness] is something that I believe is crucial. When you ...”

“What your mother thinks of me is important to me. When you didn’t clarify the situation to her...”

“It is important to me that our living spaces are always presentable. When you left your junk around....”

“I have a strong need to be cherished by my spouse. When you left me at the party for a few hours....”

SHARE WHAT GOES ON FOR YOU WHEN THIS HAPPENS

WHY THIS WORKS

You will be helping them understand how you experienced that behavior or situation, your perspective. They can't get inside your head or past history unless you share it with them.

Since they aren't always with you, you will be helping them see how their actions/ words impacted your schedule, plans, etc.

TO CONSIDER

Be as vulnerable and transparent as you share your back story behind your needs and values.

A feeling can be described in 1-2 words. Choose the word that best describes your feelings; do not exaggerate or minimize.

POSSIBLE WORDING

[What happened for me was [impact]

And this makes me feel ... [emotion]

- "...I was late and so frustrated because I couldn't finish what I need to do."
- "... I stood all alone feeling terribly lonely."
- "... I was overwhelmed with the huge list of things I had to accomplish by myself."
- "... I felt very little, like I don't matter in this family."

SUGGEST A REASONABLE FIX

WHY THIS WORKS

You demonstrate that this is important to you and that you put effort into thinking about it rather than dumping the problem back at them.

You are offering a starting point for the conversation about a fix to the issue.

TO CONSIDER

Your suggestion should be something that shows that you were thinking about the issue from their side as well, ideally win-win.

Do not expect that your proposed idea will be accepted just as you propose. Anticipate a conversation.

Since you just brought up the topic, the other person may need time to think about it.

Say what you do want, not what you don't want. (ex: not "don't be late" but rather "please come at the time you tell me you will".)

POSSIBLE WORDING

If you would ... [proposal]

"If you would take over this chore (ex: go to the supermarket once a week) ..."

"Please introduce me to your colleagues if I don't know them...."

"If you would run your guest invites by me..."

"If you ask me before you make such plans ..."

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WILL RESPOND

WHY THIS WORKS

As applicable, you are showing that you are also willing to put in the effort toward the success of this fix.

You are showing how their efforts will positively enhance your life in some way.

TO CONSIDER

Be willing to compromise, and make some changes of your own.

As applicable, express appreciation and other positive emotions.

POSSIBLE WORDING

"I will ... [your response]."

"I will set up the system so you can be successful (ex: I will organize the shopping list by aisles so you can get out of the supermarket faster)."

"I would appreciate it."

"I would feel supported and happy."

"I will have more energy/time to do [whatever]."

"I would enjoy gatherings more and I wouldn't stand around you the whole night; then you could enjoy the evening."

It is important that you use the words that accurately reflect what you are feeling or thinking. You might find these words helpful as you seek the appropriate words.

NEEDS

acceptance	be in control	peacefulness	safety
respect	be right	balance	feel included
be liked	be treated fairly	consistency	autonomy
be understood	attention	order	fun
be needed	comfort	predictability	new challenges
be valued	freedom	love	independence

CORE VALUES

authenticity	creativity	justice	recognition
achievement	curiosity	kindness	religion
adventure	determination	knowledge	reputation
authority	fairness	leadership	respect
autonomy	faith	learning	responsibility
balance	fame	love	security
beauty	friendships	loyalty	self-respect
boldness	fun	meaningful work	service
compassion	growth	openness	stability
challenge	happiness	optimism	success
citizenship	honesty	peace	status
community	humor	pleasure	trustworthiness
competency	influence	poise	wealth
contribution	inner harmony	popularity	wisdom

EMOTIONS WHEN NEEDS ARE MET

absorbed	delighted	gratified	quiet
adventurous	eager	happy	radiant
affectionate	ecstatic	helpful	rapturous
alert	effervescent	hopeful	refreshed
alive	elated	inquisitive	relaxed
amazed	enchanted	inspired	relieved
amused	encouraged	intense	satisfied
animated	energetic	interested	secure
appreciative	engrossed	invigorated	sensitive
aroused	enlivened	involved	serene
astonished	enthusiastic	joyous	spellbound
blissful	excited	joyful	splendid
breathless	exhilarated	loving	stimulated
buoyant	expansive	mellow	surprised
calm	expectant	merry	tender
carefree	exultant	mirthful	thankful
cheerful	fascinated	moved	thrilled
comfortable	free	optimistic	touched
complacent	friendly	overjoyed	tranquil
composed	fulfilled	overwhelmed	trusting
concerned	glad	peaceful	upbeat
confident	gleeful	perky	warm
contented	glorious	pleasant	wide-awake
cool	glowing	pleased	wonderful
curious	grateful	proud	zestful

EMOTIONS WHEN NEEDS ARE NOT MET

afraid	detached	horrible	reluctant
aggravated	disaffected	horrified	resentful
agitated	disappointed	hostile	restless
alarmed	discouraged	hot	sad
aloof	disgusted	humdrum	scared
angry	disheartened	hurt	sensitive
anguished	dismayed	impatient	shaky
annoyed	displeased	indifferent	shocked
anxious	disquieted	intense	sorry
apathetic	distressed	irate	spiritless
apprehensive	disturbed	irked	startled
aroused	embarrassed	irritated	surprised
ashamed	embittered	jealous	suspicious
blah	exasperated	lazy	terrified
brokenhearted	exhausted	lonely	tired
chagrined	fatigued	mad	troubled
cold	fearful	mean	uncomfortable
concerned	fidgety	miserable	uneasy
confused	forlorn	mournful	unglued
cool	frightened	nervous	unhappy
cross	frustrated	nettled	unnerved
dejected	furious	numb	upset
depressed	guilty	overwhelmed	uptight
despairing	helpless	perplexed	withdrawn
despondent	hesitant	pessimistic	worried

BE OK WITH DISAGREEMENTS

Disagreements are essentially differences of opinions, perspectives or values. And they are inevitable; we all see things differently from others from time to time. When we encounter such differences, we can use them to get to know each other better. Good, healthy disagreement leads to eye-opening discussions, growth, and potentially more closeness.

Our opinions, perspectives, views are based on our values, standards, ethics, commitments, dreams, passions, etc. When someone shares their perspectives or opinions – whether we agree with them or not – they are showing something about themselves – what is important to them, what they value, what they believe to be true.

In a healthy disagreement, people learn, explore, and challenge each other's thinking. And widen their own horizons. With curiosity, open-mindedness, and respect.

When in disagreement, it isn't about having the other person see things in our way, or bringing them over to our way. When someone is expressing their opinion, instead of asking ourselves the question, "Do I agree or disagree?", we should ask ourselves "What are they revealing about themselves right now?" or "What can I get to know about what is important to them?" We can ask, "Help me understand your perspective." "Help me understand how you came to this thought."

By working through conflict together, we'll feel closer to the other people and gain a better understanding of what matters to them and how they prefer to work.

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

When we "agree to disagree" we are essentially hitting a dead-end, and thus there is a sense of disconnect. Each side is holding onto their own truth without acknowledging that the other person has another interpretation of the same event.

Both sides can be right. Based on their experiences and logic, their perspective makes sense. At least to them. We'd be better off allowing the other to have their thought, validating and empathizing.

We don't have to agree or take on their perspective. As possible, work with those two different thoughts for a third new idea. "I can see why you would think that way. It would be easier to keep the tool box by the front door so you can just run in and get it when you need it. At the same time, I think it is more practical to use that space for coats and briefcases. I really do wish there was another space to keep the tool box close to a door."

Or agree to accept that there is a difference of perspective. "We each see this differently, and that's OK."

(In essence, you are still agreeing to disagree, but the tone is more of respect and understanding than the typical "let's just agree to disagree" ending to a conversation.)

Help me see your perspective.

THE WORDS WE USE IN A DISAGREEMENT CAN MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

Start with a soft opener. According to the Gottman Institute, 94% of the time, the way the conversation begins determines how it ends. In other words, discussions will end on the same note they begin. If we start an argument harshly by attacking the other person, we end up with at least as much tension as we began with, if not more.

Don't make it personal. Don't attack the person with words like "You are wrong." Instead, use more respectful tone: "I hear what you are saying... (many people say that)."

Start off by sharing what parts you do agree on. "I agree with that first part."

Use I statements. "I see it differently." "I have a different perspective/ point of view." "Based on my experience, I have a different way of seeing this." "I have a different experience with that." "The way I see it ..."

Don't use negative terms such as 'disagree'. Adding the word, "I respectfully disagree" or "I somewhat disagree" still has the word 'disagree' with all its connotations. Similarly, don't label the idea with phrases like "that's such a stupid idea."

Don't use the word "but", it discounts whatever was said before it. Don't say, "I hear what you are saying but it is wrong." "I agree with one part but the rest is wrong." Instead use the word "and". "I see what you are saying, and I am concerned that ..."

THINK OF A CONFLICT FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A NEUTRAL THIRD PARTY.

Often, it is helpful to think of a conflict from the perspective of a neutral third party who wants the best for all involved. How might this person resolve the disagreement?

This is not always so easy to do in the moment of disagreement. So, it is worthwhile to think in advance about how you want to incorporate this mindset into your life. Think about what obstacles you might face. How might you be more successful in this?

As a couple, you might come up with a code word between the two of you that either of you can say to help bring in that 'third person' perspective. "Let's invite Sam here. What might Sam say about the different ideas shared here?"

Like 'Sam' might do, look for what you do agree on. Proactively ask questions along the lines of: "Where are we aligned?" "What points of view do we share?" "Which areas do we agree on?"

And then work from that common goal to come up with a solution that can work for both. "We both want a memorable family experience. We have different ideas of what that looks like. What other ideas can we come up with that can address both of our desires?"

Based on my experience, I have a different way of seeing this.

HAVE HARD CONVERSATIONS WHEN YOU'RE AT YOUR BEST, NOT YOUR WORST.

Something important to talk about? Something that is uncomfortable for one or both of you? Give the conversation its best chance – by being at your best.

Don't have the conversation when you are hungry, angry, late or tired (think the acronym H.A.L.T.) You won't have a productive conversation when you don't have enough energy, brain space or capacity for it. Instead, schedule a time in the very near future to talk.

MATCH YOUR WORDS TO THE INTENSITY OF YOUR EMOTIONS.

Every emotion has degrees, from diminished to fiercely intense. Different words have different temperatures. Monitor your language and make sure your language isn't minimizing or exaggerating the intensity of emotions.

Match your words to the actual intensity of your emotions.

Are you feeling blue, stressed, heartbroken, dejected, or depressed?

Are you feeling satisfied, glad, relieved, delighted, or elated?

Are you feeling apprehensive, nervous, frightened, panicky or terrified?

Are you feeling adequate, capable, confident or powerful?

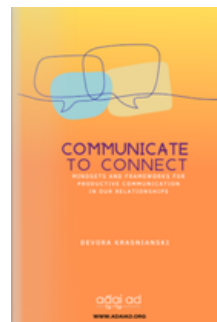
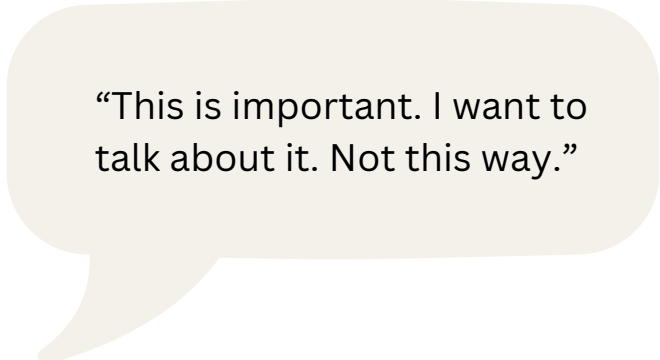
IMPORTANT TOPIC, BUT CONVERSATION NOT GOING WELL? TIME-OUT.

Sometimes, when there is conflict, the conversation doesn't go as well as we would like. Emotions may be getting in the way. The timing may be off.

You can say, “This is important. I want to talk about it. Not this way.” As possible, take a break from the conversation and pick it up when you are calmer.

“This is important. We can't have a productive conversation when either of us is yelling. We can get back to this when we are both calm.”

“This is important. I want to talk about it. Now is not a good time. Let's schedule me that works better for us.”



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