



THE GIFT OF FEEDBACK: THE STRENGTH OF EZER K'NEGDO

JOT Plus is a curated collection of Adai Ad's Just One Things (JOTs) posts. Each edition shines a light on a specific theme related to building a successful marriage. It's not meant to be a complete guide, but rather a handy, focused gathering of insights from the JOTs shared up to the time of production. *Since this is a collection—not a guide—you'll notice some ideas come up again, in different ways. That's totally on purpose, because real growth often happens when we see the same truths from a few different angles.*

THE GIFT OF FEEDBACK: THE STRENGTH OF EZER K'NEGDO

At the heart of every lasting relationship is the ability to grow — individually and together. And growth doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens through reflection, courage, and connection. It happens when we are willing to hold up a mirror for one another — not to criticize, but to help each other see more clearly.

This is the essence of the Torah's description of a partner as an **Ezer K'negdo** — a “**helper opposite.**” **Not someone who simply supports, but someone who stands across from us, with perspective and love.** Someone who (hopefully lovingly) holds up that mirror so we can notice what we might otherwise miss — our blind spots, our strengths underused, our areas for growth.

This role isn't always comfortable, but it is sacred. An Ezer K'negdo doesn't oppose in order to resist — they oppose in order to refine. Their presence invites us to expand.

Feedback, in this light, isn't a flaw in the relationship — it's a feature. It's a built-in mechanism for mutual development. When offered with care and received with openness, feedback becomes a form of connection, not correction.

This edition of JOT Plus explores how we can create a feedback culture that is aligned with the spirit of Ezer K'negdo.

- What it means to offer feedback as a form of help, not antagonism
- How to give and receive feedback with humility and concern
- Why feedback deepens trust when rooted in love
- And how to use this tool in a way that strengthens connection rather than eroding it

Because in a relationship rooted in Adai Ad — enduring love — the goal is never just to keep the peace. It's to grow, together.



The Torah describes a partner as an ezer k'negdo — a helper who is also 'against' or 'opposite' — because true support doesn't always look like agreement. Sometimes the deepest help comes from being challenged with love.

Ezer k'negdo means love with courage to help each other grow.

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MARRIAGE MEETINGS KEEP YOU ON TRACK.

A Marriage Meeting can really solidify your marriage. This is a short (about 30 minutes) check-in where the two of you share appreciation, plan together, and nip potential conflicts in the bud.

This should be a scheduled weekly meeting (separate from date night or budget meetings). A half-hour is long enough to cover everything, but short enough to keep it focused and productive.

This meeting can include:

- **Appreciation:** expressing gratitude to your spouse
- **Chores/Errands:** making sure to-dos are getting done
- **Plan for Good Times:** scheduling date nights, as well as individual and family activities
- **Problems/Challenges:** addressing conflicts/ issues/ changes in the relationship and in life in general

HOW

- **Meet weekly.** Why sit down for a discussion during a dedicated time? Talking about these things as they come up rather than at a scheduled time means that some things don't get the attention they need. Or you may simply forget to bring something up.
- **Meet as just the two of you.** No kids.
- **Minimize distractions/interruptions.** No phones.
- **Sit together.** Ideally, side by side rather than across the table; this is more intimate and welcoming.
- **Jot down notes during the week** so you remember to talk about everything that you need to.
- **Bring your organizational devices/notebooks/apps to the meeting** to jot down when/where/how of your plans.
- **Cultivate a positive atmosphere.** Allow both partners to feel ownership in the meeting.

MARRIAGE CHECK-IN MEETINGS TO CONTINUOUSLY NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

Regular marriage check-in meetings, ideally once a week or at least once a month, provide a dedicated space to ask, “How are we doing?” These sessions are essential for maintaining a strong and healthy relationship.

During these meetings, openly discuss your feelings, concerns, and goals. It's a time to listen actively, validate each other's emotions, and collaborate on addressing any issues that arise.

Additionally, set aside special moments, such as on anniversaries or another meaningful day, to conduct more in-depth evaluations. Use these times to celebrate successes, express gratitude, and reaffirm your commitment to each other.

By prioritizing these regular check-ins and occasional evaluations, you build a foundation of trust, communication, and mutual support. This proactive approach helps your relationship thrive and grow stronger over time. Make it a habit to nurture your connection consistently, and watch your partnership flourish!


Based on Marcia Naomi Berger's book about Marriage Meetings

ZOOMING OUT: A MARRIAGE CHECK-IN CONVERSATION









Take the time together to zoom out of the relationship and check in with each other about your marriage.

It's important to have these check-ins. It shows you both that you care about the marriage. Also, you can work on fixing things before they get too deep.

Start off with what is going well and then move into what each of you can do to enhance and enrich the marriage.

Asking questions that begin with  "What could I do to..." lets your spouse know you're willing to take action to change.

Prepare for the conversation by thinking about questions such as these:

-  "What is going well in our marriage?"
-  "What can I do to make you feel more loved/ honored/ appreciated?"
-  "How can I support you even better?"
-  "What can I do to make you feel more understood?"
-  "What can I do to help you understand me better?"
-  "If you could change one thing about our marriage, what would it be?"
-  "Where have we been struggling? What can we do to resolve this?"
-  "How do you envision our future together? What can we do together to achieve that goal?"

Such conversations can strengthen the bond between you and your spouse and make both of you more aware of what is and isn't working in your relationship.

DEVELOP A CULTURE OF FEEDBACK.

Feedback and hearing each other's perspectives are how we grow and learn about each other. It is important in a relationship. But giving feedback can be stressful – both to the receiver and the giver.

When receiving feedback, many people jump into self-preservation mode and defend themselves. And just knowing that the other may not accept the feedback as intended can be stressful to the giver.

As such, it is better for the relationship when there is a culture of requesting feedback. This model offers both the receiver and the giver much more psychological safety than a giver-led approach.



When people ask for feedback, they feel greater autonomy and certainty because they are in the driver's seat — they can steer the conversation where it'll be most useful.

Givers, in turn, feel more certainty because they have clearer guidelines for the kind of feedback they should give.

ASK FOR FEEDBACK. AND ACTUALLY LISTEN.

Whether it's in relationships, work, or personal growth, feedback is one of the most powerful tools we have. But only if we're brave enough to ask for it—and open enough to hear it.

Ask:

- “How am I doing?”
- “Is there something I could be doing better?”
- “Anything you wish I knew or noticed more?”

Then pause. Don't explain. Don't defend. Just listen.

Your only job:

- Thank them.
- Sit with what they said.
- Decide what you want to take from it.

You don't have to agree with everything. But if you want to grow, you have to be willing to hear what others experience around you—even when it stings.

Gracious receiving sounds like:

- “That's hard to hear, but I appreciate you telling me.”
- “Thanks for being honest.”
- “I'm going to think about that.”

FEEDBACK LOOKS BACKWARDS. ADVICE IS FUTURE-ORIENTED.

Don't ask for feedback; ask for advice. Feedback has the connotation of past-thinking. Advice is forward-thinking.

Feedback is often associated with evaluation, and judgment about performance in the past. This makes it harder to imagine someone's future and possibly better performance. As a result, feedback givers end up providing less critical and actionable input.

In contrast, when asked to provide advice, people focus less on evaluation and more on possible future actions. Whereas the past is unchangeable, the future is full of possibilities. So, if you ask someone for advice, they will be more likely to think forward to future opportunities to improve rather than backwards to the things you have done, which you can no longer change.

“Based on what I just did, what advice can you give me?” rather than “What feedback do you have for me?”

FEEDBACK IS A GIFT TO HELP YOU GROW.

Feedback and respectful confrontation are gifts we share to help one another grow.

The key is your intent. If you really are providing the feedback to help your spouse, your words and tone should reflect that. That is, once you know the best way to share your insights.

Start off by asking for permission to share. “Can I share something?”

Then, be future focused, rather than dwell on the past ineffectiveness or issue. It's easier for others to listen about what hasn't happened yet – future behavior. “In the future, you might consider adding a story into your Dvar Torah to make it even more interesting.” Compare that to: “Your last Dvar Torah was missing something; it didn't really capture my attention.”

Lastly, if the other person is not willing to receive your feedback, drop it. You don't need to ram it down their throat.

CARE-FRONTATION. NOT CONFRONTATION.

CONFRONTATION DONE IN A CARING OR LOVING MANNER.

The core of care-frontation is to approach the person from the heart: with compassion rather than recrimination. This is the best way to get anyone's attention. Not only starting from heart, but also leading the conversation from the heart. A care-frontation makes it possible to then hear from the heart. "Words that emanate from the heart – enter the heart."

The care-frontation must clearly be for the benefit of the other person (and in the case of a couple, for the marriage). The other person has to know that you care about them, are on their side, and want what's best for them. If they feel you have your own self-interest at heart — and not theirs — they won't listen to what you're saying. Your attitude and the words that follow must be: "I care for you deeply; I truly believe – after serious thinking and reflection – that this behavior is not in your best interest, and that is why I bring it up."

HOW TO DELIVER CARE-FRONTATION:

Believe that this will work out. Too often, people see confrontation as 'at least I tried' or as a step that has to be taken in a process. When you truly believe that there will be a productive outcome, your words and demeanor will follow.

In a way that it will actually be received. The Sefer Chasidim teaches: Prior to admonishing someone, the mochiach should analyze carefully what will be the most effective way to influence the other. Similarly, the care-frontation should be tailor-made to the person receiving it and presented in a way that is most likely to inspire them to change. You can use questions, stories, parables, and/or logical proofs – depending on what will speak most convincingly to the heart of the other person.

Think of the best way for the person to realize the truth themselves. Nobody likes to be told what to do. It is the act of self-realization that eliminates the defensive reaction... and produces effective introspection needed for change.

Affirm and acknowledge who they are. Show them that you recognize the good in them. Of course, only if you really do. 🗣️ "You are such a devoted parent." Don't negate this with a 'but' or 'however'. 🗣️ "You care so much for the children, and they love you. Recently, it seems that you might be feeling despondent about something and it seems to be affecting how you are with the children."

Choose words to show you care. 🗣️ "I know the authentic you to be X, but I think I'm seeing Y. And I care about and appreciate the authentic you. I would like to help resolve the perceived dilemma." 🗣️ "Ever since we became a family, you've always been there for us – you did whatever had to be done. Nothing got in your way. [You can share examples here.] It seems like something is going on for you now that is getting in the way. I know you have what it takes to get back to where you were. What I don't know is the best way to give you support and encouragement to do that."





Address the action, not the person. Be specific. Leave room for their dignity. Give the person the benefit of the doubt. Choose your words so that there is room for them to clarify or explain the reasons for their behavior. ... “It seems to me ...”, ... “This is what I am noticing, ... Am I getting it right?”

Some words to avoid: Absolute words like: “You always”, “You never”. Any words of sarcasm.

Choose the time and place carefully. Such conversations should be done in private. Knowing the person and the situation, you can best determine when during the day or week is best for such a conversation.

When it's done with heart, care-frontation isn't a wedge—it's a bridge. You're not confronting someone. You're offering them your belief in who they are, and your willingness to stand beside them in becoming more of that. That's love.
That's care.
That's what makes it land.



DON'T ONLY BE NICE, BE HELPFUL IN A NICE WAY.

It may be easier to only be nice, but it isn't always the most helpful. If you have feedback about something another person did or said that can actually help them improve or enhance their work or life, be helpful and share it. But be nice about it.

If you don't bring it up, they may never improve in that area.

Especially if you complimented them on a job well done – when you really saw that it needed some improvement.

When you say “great talk” to a mediocre talk, you aren't being helpful. And really, you're not being all that nice then either.

Actually, bringing it up in a respectful way is compassionate and useful.

In a loving relationship, we should be able to accept useful feedback. Because we know that it is coming from a place of compassion and love, for the benefit of the receiver.

First, ask if they'd like to hear some insights or feedback. ... “Can I share some feedback?” ... “I have something to share about [your talk]. Are you interested in hearing it?”

Once you are granted permission, say it. Clearly, concisely, nicely. But don't half-say it, or hint.

Actually, give such feedback often. Make it part of your culture of your marriage, of helping each other grow. Ironically, the less often you give such feedback, the more critical it feels when it is received.


CONCERN-SHAMING VS GENUINE CONCERN.

Genuine concern is rooted in love and care, aimed at supporting and uplifting others.

Concern-shaming disguises criticism as genuine concern, fueled by a desire to feel superior and put others down.

Concern-shaming is like turning compassion into a weapon, making people feel guilty or inadequate for their choices. Unsolicited advice and judgment, especially from someone who doesn't truly grasp the circumstances, can be overwhelming and counterproductive.

To express genuine concern and support others effectively:


- **Practice empathy and understanding:** Put yourself in their shoes, striving to comprehend their perspective and challenges. Avoid being judgmental or dismissive of their feelings and experiences.
- **Seek permission to share your perspective:** Before providing unsolicited input, ask if they are open to hearing your thoughts.
- **Offer support, not judgment:** Instead of focusing on their mistakes, extend a helping hand and inquire how you can be of assistance.
- **Use "I" statements:** When expressing concerns, use "I" statements to convey your feelings without sounding accusatory.  "I'm worried about your well-being" rather than "You're making terrible choices."
- **Respect boundaries:** Understand that not everyone may want or need your input. Respect their autonomy and decision to handle matters on their own.

NAGGING VS SUPPORTING.

Nagging is "See what you are not?" Support is "Look at all you can be."

In both cases, you want to help your spouse become a better version of themselves. **It's your mindset and the words that come from that mindset that make all the difference.**

Nagging comes from the mindset that you don't think they are competent or have things under control (perhaps it is subconsciously). The words that follow sound accusatory or condescending. "Don't forget to do X." "You need to do Y." "Why haven't you done Z yet?" "Don't eat that!" And the tone makes it worse. Nagging brings on a vicious cycle of complaining and withdrawing, feeling hopeless and controlled.

Support comes from the mindset of caring for the other person. You want them to have the best life they can.  "I know you are trying to live a healthy lifestyle. Would it be helpful to you if I prepared a salad everyday?" The other person then feels that someone has their back, that someone will encourage them through the hard times.

NAGGING IS IN THE EAR OF THE BEHOLDER.

You may have every 'right' to expect something from your spouse or someone else and so you constantly remind them to do it. But they consistently don't do it or ignore your requests. And you remind them again. That's nagging. And people don't respond well to nagging.

Even if you don't think of yourself as nagging, if that is how the other person feels, then they very well may resist. Not because they don't want to do what you are asking for, but it might be because they are unwilling to accept the implication that you are boss.

GETTING YOUR SPOUSE TO FINALLY HEAR YOUR COMPLAINTS*

**COMPLAINING IS FEEDBACK, IT IS NOT CRITICIZING.
THERE IS A PLACE FOR COMPLAINTS IN A MARRIAGE.**

There will be issues or differences in every marriage, and there will always be a need for adjustments to be made – all through the life of a marriage. If these are unaddressed, they just pile up until the couple drowns in them with bitterness and resentment.

It is important to express the existence of a problem. Otherwise, how would a spouse know what needs to be changed? Without feedback as to how spouses are affecting each other, those adjustments are impossible.

It is all about how to bring up those adjustments that are needed. A complaint is simply alerting a spouse to the fact that what they're doing, or not doing, is having a negative emotional effect. It's feedback.

A complaint is not a criticism. A criticism adds a disrespectful judgment to a complaint. The difference is in the attitude and mindset, and the words and actions that come from there.

When we criticize someone (or something), we're saying "Here's what's wrong with you/it." When we complain, we're saying "I'm not happy about this."

Criticizing puts more attention on the person/thing being criticized. Complaining puts more attention on the person expressing the issue.

Criticism focuses on their character. When we use criticism, we make it about a person's self. "Are you too lazy to pick up your towel?" is a criticism. Complaining focuses on a person's behavior. When we voice a complaint, we identify a specific behavior that we'd like someone to change. "I don't like when you leave your towel on the bathroom floor" is a complaint.

Avoiding or failing to express our adverse reactions can lead to unresolved issues and resentment. Share feedback – as complaints, not criticism. **(It may be semantics, it's really about the attitude and the words.)**

WORDS TO USE:

"IT'S NOT A BIG DEAL. BUT I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT IT."

Keep things in perspective. And most things are not really a big deal. It's just that you prefer it be differently. You can say, "It's not a big deal but I just want you to know about it."

... "It's not a big deal, but it would make me so much happier if you hung up your coat in the closet rather than on the back of the chair."

... "This is not a big deal but I want you to know that when you said [that], I felt [feeling]. I prefer that you word it this way [wording], it would make me less anxious."

What is powerful about the words 'it's not a big deal' is that you are not criticizing or saying anything about their character, and thus they will be less likely to get defensive. It is also implying that the relationship is safe and they don't have to become anxious. Lastly, you are stating your preference or helping them learn something about you in a non-confrontational way.

The key is to say the words "It's not a big deal" in the beginning of the statement. This relaxes the tone as the other person listens to what you are bringing up.

TUNE INTO WHAT IS UNDER THE COMPLAINT. THERE'S A VALUE OF YOURS THAT IS NOT BEING ADDRESSED.

People complain because something that matters to us isn't going as we expected. Complaints indicate what people care about most – about what we value and need.

- A complaint about the garbage might really be about not feeling like a team in taking care of household responsibilities.
- A complaint about spending habits might really be about feeling insecure about financial future.
- A complaint about in-laws showing up might really be about a need for privacy.
- A complaint about working too much might really be about wanting to spend more time together.

When we complain, we should ask ourselves: “What is it that I really care about that is not happening here?” Often, it is helpful to listen to the words of the complaint. **Words like “should”, “ought”, and other assumption language can help us recognize our expectation/ disappointment.** “A husband/ wife ought to...” “In a marriage, there should be ...”. It might be things like connection, fairness, appreciation, being considered when decisions are made, etc.

Once we have identified what is under the complaint, we can better formulate what is going on for us and express it better to our spouse. We can talk to our emotions about not getting what we so value or want. You might use Howard Markman's XYZ formula **“When you do X, in situation Y, I feel Z.”**

💬 “When you look at your phone when we are talking, I feel lonely. I want to connect with you at the end of a long day.”

💬 “When we are talking about an issue, and you interrupt me or cut me off mid-sentence, I feel invalidated and put down.”

When you express your complaint in this way – by sharing your feelings about what is going on and what really want – you are giving your partner usable information that they can act on.



ADDRESS THE CURRENT ACTION, NOT THE PERSON.

Avoid global labels – criticizing the whole person, rather than the action.

When criticizing the person instead of the action, you are essentially saying that the other person is bad to the core.

In using global labels, you are trying to wash your hands of any responsibility for the problem or your feelings around their action. However, at the same time, your spouse will feel unable and unwilling to do anything about it either.

Avoid saying, “You are so lazy.” “You are so self-centered.” “You are so helpless.”

Instead, address the current problem. 💬 “When you left the socks on the floor, I felt distressed. I like a clean house.”

PREPARING FOR AN EFFECTIVE COMPLAINT.

Something is bothering you, and you want an adjustment. It is worthwhile to think through how you will present it so that you will more likely be heard, and there will be some change.

Determine that this is worth bringing up. Is this something that has a possibility of being changed? Also think: If I say this, what will it do for our relationship?

What do you want to achieve? Take a moment to figure out what will make you feel satisfied or better. This will help you express what you actually want more clearly—and make it more likely that you'll get it.

Plan your words. Think about how your spouse will best receive your words. Choose the accurate words to describe your feelings and the change you want.

What is the best venue/ method? You know your situation best. What is the best setting? While in-person conversation is generally best, in this particular case, maybe a letter or a voicenote is better so each can collect your thoughts and re-read and edit what you write.

When is the best timing? Be aware of your own and your spouse's mood and tendencies. You might also ask them when would be a good time to bring something up.

Have this conversation only when you are calm. Your whole demeanor will play into the effectiveness of the conversation – your tone and body language matter. If you are asking for a change from someone, it is best to bring it up when you are least likely to scream, yell, or say regrettable words.

COMPLAINTS HAVE 2 ELEMENTS – 1. THE FEELINGS AND 2. THE TASK.

When we complain, there are the feelings (upset, lonely, invisible, disrespected, underappreciated) and the desire for something to be different (share responsibilities, more time together).

Often, we can respectfully share both with our spouse in one conversation. But sometimes, after thinking about it, we recognize that our spouse won't respond well to the feelings part of the conversation. They may take it too personally – for whatever reason – and it may derail the whole conversation.

These two parts of a complaint can really be separated. We can complain/vent to friends and get the sympathy, empathy and validation there. And bring only the task or change request conversation to our spouse.

Instead of “I am feeling lonely in this marriage. I want to spend more time...”, you might say something like 🗣️ “I miss our laughing together. I would really love to spend more time together. How can we make that happen?” or 🗣️ “We both have busy lives. Can we sit down with our list of to-dos and figure out how we can get everything done?”

AN EFFECTIVE STRUCTURE OF A COMPLAINT: THE COMPLAINT SANDWICH.

The hope when expressing a complaint is that the other person will listen and make some change. How the complaint is crafted (and delivered) is important. Guy Winch, in his book *Squeaky Wheel*, recommends a formula called “the complaint sandwich”.

1. The first “slice of bread” in the sandwich is the ‘ear opener’, a positive statement that will hopefully make the listener less defensive. 🗣️ “You know, you are such a caring person in so many ways, and I love being married to you.”

2. The meat of the sandwich is the complaint itself. And keep it lean, that is, specific and to this present incident. Stick to the facts of what happened, without judging their character or intent. 🗣️ “I saw the dish in the sink” is much more effective than “You are so inconsiderate” or “You think I’m the servant here” or “Why do you think I am the one who has to do the dishes?” or “I hate when you...” or “Why don’t we...”

3. The last part of the sandwich is another positive statement, one that might motivate the other person to make the requested change, or to do things differently. 🗣️ “If you could make an effort to put your dirty dishes into the dishwasher, it would make me so happy.”

As applicable, you can also ask for their insights and invite their ideas and solutions about how things can be different. 🗣️ “How about ...?” 🗣️ “How would you feel about ...?” 🗣️ “What are your thoughts about ...?” 🗣️ “Does that work for you? How might you tweak that idea?”

And your tone matters. Keep it civil.



START CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CONFLICT – SOFTLY.

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 you start an argument harshly by attacking your partner, you will end up with at least as much tension as you began with, if not more.

Soften the start-up of your conversations about conflicts and those conversations will likely be resolved in a more amicable manner.

The goal of this soft conversation opener is to protect both you and the other from feeling either attacked or defensive.

When done correctly, you can bring up a legitimate disagreement, concern, issue, complaint, or need without blaming your partner or judging their character.

Complain – with I statements. State how you feel about what happened (or didn’t happen). Without blaming or judging. And state your need or what you would like to happen. 🗣️ “I am exhausted from chasing the kids all day. I seem to be the only one with the kids today. I need a break.” Compare that to a blaming and judging statement. “I can’t take it anymore. I’m the only one who does anything around here. Can’t you do something already!”

ARE THERE DOUBLE STANDARDS IN YOUR MARRIAGE?

A double standard is a rule or principle that is unfairly applied in different ways to different people.

In a marriage, double standards may show up as one expecting their needs to be met without meeting the needs of the spouse. Sometimes this is done without even realizing it (albeit, sometimes it is intentional).

- Do you expect quiet when you are sleeping, but then make noise when your spouse is sleeping?
- Do you want your spouse to notice when you are down, but don't notice when they are feeling down?
- Do you want to spend time with your parents, but dismiss your spouse's desires to spend time with their parents?
- Do you spend money on frivolous things for yourself, but are critical when your spouse spends on themselves?
- Do you expect your spouse not to share certain things, but then go sharing yourself?
- Do you make snide comments, but then get upset when your spouse says similar things to you?
- Do you want 'me' time, but don't give that time to your spouse?

Sometimes you are completely unaware that you are doing this. If your spouse calls you out on this, listen to how they experience what is going on and thank them for bringing it up. They are expressing something that can make your relationship stronger.

Do not shoot down what they have just shared. Don't get defensive. Even if it was said in not the easiest way to hear, listen to the message, not the packaging. 💬 "Thank you, I didn't realize I was doing that. I'm glad you brought up your perspective."

DON'T POINT OUT EVERY TINY FLAW.

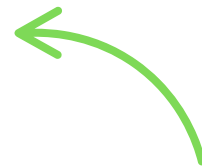
Nitpicking: It can be easy to pick apart aspects of your spouse that you dislike or don't agree with. (Everyone has something.) When you point out what one another has or hasn't done or how your spouse said or did something wrong, you are belittling, embarrassing, and demeaning them.

You're also saying that you want the other person to change and that they aren't good enough.

Essentially, nitpicking is a sign that you don't fully respect your spouse. Even if this isn't your intention, it can be received this way.

Before you decide to nitpick, focus on your internal feelings. What is it that you really need? Attention? To be heard or seen? To feel good about yourself? There's a good chance the nitpicking is just a poor attempt to get some other important need met.

It's important to accept that your spouse will have some habits that annoy you. **All marriages have unsolvable problems that you simply need to learn to live with.**



SAY ONE THING AT A TIME.

When you're bringing something up that's bothering you, stick to one complaint at a time.

Your goal isn't just to vent—it's to open the door for change or understanding. But when you bring up a list, it can feel overwhelming or like an attack. That makes it harder for the other person to actually hear what matters to you.

Choose one concern that feels most important. Speak to what's underneath it—what you care about, what value was stepped on, what you were hoping for.

Ask yourself: "What's the one thing I most want them to understand right now?"

One thing. Clearly said. That's what creates space for real change.

DON'T ARGUE ABOUT SOMETHING THAT CAN'T BE HELPED.

Don't start something that has no end.

"I wish you were taller and wouldn't need help reaching everything." "I wish you were more handy." "Every time you plan a day, it rains. You couldn't even get that right."

Seriously, what is the point?

Complaints are remembered much longer than compliments. Choose your negative comments and feedback carefully.

"I FEEL ... I WOULD LIKE ..."

It is important to communicate what you want or need from your spouse. It is not fair to make them guess. And, in the end, you won't be getting what you want or need.

State your feelings and then what you would like to happen. ... "I'm feeling [negative emotion]. And I want to feel [positive emotion]. This is what I want from you..."

... "When I did ABC and you didn't acknowledge my efforts, I'm feeling hurt and angry. I want to feel appreciated. This is what would help me feel appreciated."

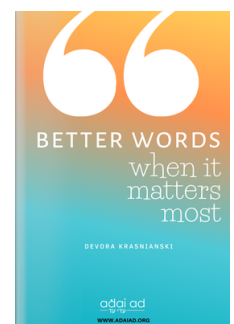
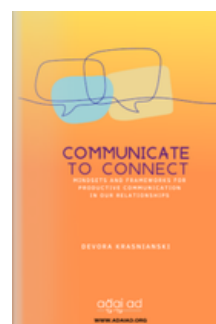
Notice in the second half of the sentence, the words are not "make me feel appreciated". It's "help me feel". Only you own how you feel; no one makes you feel anything.

The key is to state how you would like to feel and then make your request. State what you do want, not what you don't want them to do. Not, "I want you to stop ignoring me." Rather, ... "I'd like to spend some time together every evening, at least X minutes. Would you be willing to do that?"

It is important that your mindset and words do not imply that you are assigning blame to them for what you are feeling. This will derail everything. Stick to true "I statements".

Books from Adai Ad

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THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ASKING AND DEMANDING: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS.

Wanting something doesn't guarantee you'll get it. Even when you express your desires and make requests, there's no assurance that your wishes will be fulfilled.

Here's the key distinction: **If you find yourself becoming angry when you don't get something you want or ask for, it might be a sign that you're not merely asking but demanding.**

Asking is a respectful expression of your desires, recognizing that others have their own needs and limitations. It's a willingness to accept both acceptance and rejection of your request gracefully.

Demanding, on the other hand, carries an implicit expectation that your wishes must be met, often accompanied by frustration or anger when they aren't.

In relationships and communication, it's essential to strike a balance between expressing your desires and understanding that others have their own boundaries and constraints.


Practicing understanding and patience when you don't get what you want can lead to healthier interactions and more harmonious relationships. The mere act of asking doesn't guarantee you'll receive, but it does foster open and respectful communication.

TURN COMPLAINTS INTO COMMITMENTS.


When you notice yourself complaining, pause and ask:

“What do I really care about that isn't happening here?”

Complaints are often unspoken values in disguise. You may not realize how deeply committed you are to something—like honesty, reliability, or being considered—until it feels ignored or violated. That's when it shows up as frustration, criticism, or resentment.

When bringing it up, try naming the value behind it. Say,  “This really matters to me.”


It's about letting the other person know what's important to you. When you express the value or commitment underneath the complaint, the conversation becomes clearer, kinder, and more productive.

For example, instead of saying, “You never listen to me,” try,  “Feeling heard is really important to me—I want to know we can understand each other.”

TALK ABOUT POSITIVE, NOT ONLY NEGATIVE.

Talk about what pleases you, not only what bothers you.

Preface negative statements with positive ones that let your spouse know that you haven't forgotten their good qualities, even when you are upset about something.

 “I know that you have good intentions when you say that you'll be home early... It's a real problem for me when you don't come home when you said you would. What I would like is for you to come home in time for the kids to see you before they go to bed. How can we make that happen?”

NOTE: Your mindset and the words that come from your intention matter most. This is not a technique, like the ‘praise sandwich’. Rather, it is a way for both of you to keep the problem in perspective.

Remembering the whole person will make you a bit less angry and the person receiving the feedback is less defensive. In

this way, you can have a productive conversation to address the issue.

HOW TO BRING UP SENSITIVE PREFERENCES

Sometimes you wish your partner would dress differently or make different choices around the house. **These are personal preferences, and sharing them can feel tricky because clothing and style are very much their 'page'—not yours.**

The key is to stay on your page: you can express your preferences kindly, but it's never about control or demands. Respect their autonomy and avoid trying to fix or change them.

Here's how to share what you'd love—respectfully and kindly—while honoring boundaries:

Focus on your feelings, not on “right” or “wrong.” Instead of telling them what to change, talk about how it makes you feel:

💬 “When you dress a certain way, it makes me feel really proud.”

💬 “I noticed how great you looked the other day—it really caught my eye. Would you be open to trying something like that more often?”

Respect their style and personality. Make it clear this isn't about changing who they are:

💬 “I love your unique style—it's so you! I'm just curious if you'd be open to trying something a little different now and then.”

Invite collaboration, not demands. Frame it as a shared exploration:

💬 “Maybe we can try some new looks together, just for fun.”

💬 “Let's find ways to blend our tastes so our home feels like ours.”

Stay in your lane and accept their choice. Your preferences matter, but so does their autonomy. If they aren't interested in changing, respect that. This builds trust and connection far more than pressure ever could.



CORRECTION REDUCES CONNECTION.

When you try to correct your spouse (or suggest a change), you are using up some of those goodwill credits in your relationship. Even if you say it with love and concern only for them.

Nobody likes to be called out on their mistakes or failures, or even more so, on things they really can't control.

Think of what your asking for a change might look like from their perspective. They might be thinking that you don't respect who they are, that you don't trust them, that you want a different type of spouse, that you think you are better than them, that you want to exert control. Of course, that would negatively impact the connection and relationship.

This is not to say that you can never ask for changes. Just know in advance that it deducts from that goodwill. Ask yourself: Is this particular ask worth it? If you deem it necessary, present in a way that you know/hope will be best received.

HOW TO RESPOND TO YOUR SPOUSE'S REQUESTS FOR CHANGE.

While it might be difficult to hear their message or wish it was communicated differently, it's the substance of what they're saying that matters – more than how it's delivered. While you may not agree with what they are saying, or you really don't think the change is needed, they are expressing a need or want, and it is important to listen. To really listen.

Approach the conversation with deep curiosity, seeking to really understand their perspective and perception. That is listen, listen, listen. The only talking you do at this point is to ask questions so you can better understand their point.

Take what they are expressing seriously. And be prepared to work on the issue they are expressing.

A constructive response might involve acknowledging their viewpoint with phrases like, ... “Hmm, I didn't realize. I didn't think of it from that angle. Thanks for bringing it up. I will [commit to the change you are willing to work on].”

“Thank you for bringing it up.
I didn't realize that.”

Embrace the correction as a gift. Your response to the correction should reflect that you are grateful for them sharing with you.

Keep it short; admit the mistake or your role in the issue, and thank them for helping. Do not try to rationalize your point of view or defend yourself. This shows your willingness to take in other perspectives and learn.



When your spouse brings up concerns or requests for change, how you respond can impact the issue at hand. And even more so, your whole relationship.

... “Thank You. I needed to hear that.”

... “Huh. You know... you're right. I appreciate your mentioning that.”

... “You're right. Yeah.. I... can't believe I actually did/said that.”

... “Wow, yeah. You're right. Sorry about that.”

... “Thank you for sharing this with me.”

... “I hadn't thought of it like that. I understand now. Thank you.”

HOW NOT TO RESPOND TO YOUR SPOUSE'S REQUESTS FOR CHANGE.

These are ways that some people respond that are not helpful to the issue and definitely to the relationship. Don't respond in these ways.

Don't Become Defensive: Don't focus solely on justifying your actions rather than genuinely listening to your spouse's perspective. 🚫 Don't say: "I wouldn't have done that if you hadn't pushed me into it."

Don't Minimize: Don't downplay the significance of your spouse's complaints or invalidate their feelings. 🚫 Don't say: "You're making a big deal out of nothing; it's not that serious."

Don't Shift Blame: Don't shift blame onto your spouse or external circumstances, thereby avoiding accountability and responsibility for your actions. 🚫 Don't say: "If you were more understanding, I wouldn't have snapped at you." 🚫 "If you had done [something differently], we wouldn't be in this position."

Don't Gaslight: Don't manipulate your spouse's perception of reality to invalidate their feelings or experiences. This includes denying the validity of their complaints or distorting facts. 🚫 Don't say: "You're imagining things; I never said or did that."

Don't Stonewall: Don't shut down communication or withdraw from the conversation entirely, refusing to engage with your spouse's concerns. This can leave the other person feeling unheard and frustrated. 🚫 Don't say: "I don't want to talk about this right now; let's just drop it."

Don't Counter-attack: Don't deflect by bringing up unrelated grievances or criticizing your spouse instead of addressing the concern that they brought up. This just escalates the conflict rather than seeking resolution. 🚫 Don't say: "Well, if we're going to talk about things you don't like, let's talk about your flaws too."

Don't Ignore: Don't ignore or dismiss your spouse's requests for change. This can demonstrate a lack of respect for their needs and undermine the trust and intimacy in the relationship. Example: Silence or changing the subject when your spouse brings up an issue.

Don't Invalidate: Don't belittle or dismiss their emotions or their perception of the situation. It can lead to feelings of resentment, insecurity, and a breakdown in communication. 🚫 Don't say: "Stop being so sensitive; it's not that big of a deal."

Don't be Passive-aggressive: Don't give silent treatment or make sarcastic remarks instead of addressing concerns directly. This can exacerbate tension and hinder effective communication. 🚫 Don't say: "Oh, I guess I'll just have to remember to do everything perfectly since you're so perfect."

Don't escalate: Don't resort to yelling, insults, or other aggressive behaviors. This not only fails to address the underlying issues but can also cause emotional harm to both parties. 🚫 Don't say: "You always do this! You never listen to me, and I'm tired of it!"

LISTEN INTO THE COMPLAINT.

People complain when something they care about isn't going the way they expected. Complaints can be quite revealing. They often point to what someone values most.

Within every complaint is a request, even if it's unspoken. The key is not to get distracted by the tone or wording, but to tune in to what's underneath.

What is your partner really saying—or trying to say?

When someone complains, ask yourself: Where are they feeling let down?

Listen for the disappointment. Words like “should,” “ought to,” or “always” often signal an underlying expectation. If you can hear the deeper message, you'll be better equipped to respond in a meaningful way.

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR GROWTH AREAS.

A growth area is something that you ought to work on to live your best self – as an individual and in the coupleship. We all have areas in which we should grow. And growing is a life-long endeavor.

Throughout our lives, we should always be growing and improving.

As humans, we have blindspots where we don't recognize some of these growth areas.

Your spouse notices those and will point them out to you from time to time. While it may be hard to hear it, accept their insights as a gift; you now know an area in which you can grow. (You may not be able to work on all your growth areas at once, nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge it rather than deny it.)

If you notice a growth area in your spouse, be kind. Choose when and how to share so that it is received well. Don't complain, nag or belittle; those will definitely not inspire change.

DO YOU HEAR CRITICISM WHERE NONE IS INTENDED?

Is it possible that you tend to interpret ambiguous or neutral information negatively? Why is that?

Do you judge yourself harshly and you just assume that others will judge you harshly too?

Do you subconsciously feel that you are not worthy of respect and adoration, so you hear things that aren't even there?

Do you have a sensitivity to criticism from something in your past? Were you constantly belittled or blamed?

The first thing is to recognize that you may be acutely sensitive to people's words and you may be interpreting them differently than was intended. When you do hear words that sound like criticism to you, ask yourself if the context truly calls for a critique or is it possible that you are misinterpreting their words.

You may also run the words by someone else to get their insights.

Lastly, there is no rule that you have to react to anyone's words, especially if they are triggering to you. You really don't have to let the other person know how you are feeling every time. For starters, when you do react, you are giving the comment more life and energy than it would have had if you just shrugged it off. Additionally, some people say things just to get a reaction, don't give it to them.

Sometimes, the criticism is indeed warranted, and it is worthwhile to take heed.

TUNE IN TO WHAT YOUR SPOUSE NEEDS.

Being a good spouse involves much more than simply fulfilling traditional roles or responsibilities. It's about being present and attuned to what your partner needs, recognizing that those needs can change as life unfolds. What worked for your relationship a few years ago or even last month may not resonate with your spouse in this moment. So, who do you need to be to support your partner effectively?

Here are two essential tips to help you tune in to your spouse's needs:

Listen, listen, listen. Make a conscious effort to pay attention to their complaints and the things they wish were different. This means not just hearing their words but truly understanding their feelings and concerns. Create an open environment where they feel safe expressing themselves without fear of judgment. Sometimes, the smallest comments can reveal a lot about what your spouse is feeling. So, practice active listening by reflecting back what you hear and asking follow-up questions to dig deeper into their thoughts and emotions.

Ask directly. Initiating a conversation by asking, “What can I be doing to make your life better or easier?” demonstrates that you genuinely care about their well-being and are willing to adapt. Regularly checking in can foster deeper communication and strengthen your connection. It's essential to approach this question with an open heart and a willingness to embrace whatever feedback they offer. This kind of dialogue not only shows your commitment to supporting them but also encourages a mutual exchange of needs and desires.

By actively tuning in and adjusting to each other's evolving needs, you can create a supportive and loving partnership that grows stronger over time.

USE GENTLE REMINDERS TO NAVIGATE BAD PATTERNS TOGETHER.

So you've noticed together that you have a harmful pattern such as interrupting each other during conversations.

You've spoken about it and want to work on it. **Agree on a way to gently remind each other when you slip back into it.** For example, you might use a specific phrase or signal like, “Let's remember our agreement” or “Time to pause and reset.” Or simply say, “We're interrupting each other again.”

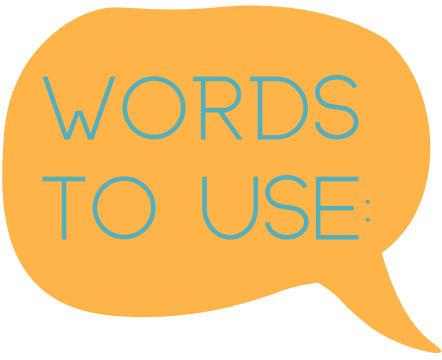
This approach fosters awareness and encourages both of you to address the issue constructively, rather than letting it undermine your relationship. By having a shared strategy for gentle reminders, such as a code word like “pause” or a signal like raising your hand, you create a supportive environment where both partners feel respected and involved in the process of positive change.

This helps to keep the focus on growth and improvement, rather than placing blame, which strengthens your partnership and builds resilience together.



Feedback isn't a personal attack.

It's a chance to expand your awareness, sharpen your instincts, and deepen your connections.



WORDS TO USE:

The way we give and receive feedback can strengthen trust, build connection, and improve communication in a marriage. It's not just about what you say — how, when, and where you say it matters just as much. Nonverbal cues like tone of voice, facial expressions, posture, and timing all send messages, too. Choosing a moment when both partners are calm and undistracted helps ensure your feedback can be heard and responded to with care.

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Expressions of gratitude and appreciation build connection and help your spouse feel seen and valued.

- ... “I felt really supported when you took care of that without me asking.”
- ... “I love how you always make time for the kids — it means so much.”
- ... “I’ve noticed how hard you’ve been working lately, and I admire your dedication.”
- ... “I feel really safe when you hold space for me like that.”
- ... “Thank you for being so patient with me yesterday.”
- ... “It makes a big difference when you check in during the day.”
- ... “I appreciate how you handled that situation with so much care.”
- ... “I really enjoy spending time with you — even in the small moments.”
- ... “You’re really thoughtful, and it doesn’t go unnoticed.”
- ... “I feel blessed/ lucky to be doing life with you.”

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

These responses show how to receive feedback with openness, empathy, and a willingness to understand and grow, creating a safe space for honest communication.

- ... “Thank you for telling me that — I’m listening.”
- ... “I didn’t realize that hurt you. I’m really sorry.”
- ... “I want to understand — can you say more?”
- ... “That’s hard to hear, but I appreciate your honesty.”
- ... “I see now how that affected you. I’m taking that in.”
- ... “Thank you for trusting me with that.”
- ... “I need a moment to take this in, but I’m not shutting down.”
- ... “I didn’t mean to hurt you, but I get why you felt that way.”
- ... “I want to do better — can you help me understand what would help?”
- ... “You’re right. I dropped the ball there. Thank you for pointing it out kindly.”
- ... “I want us to keep talking about this. Your feelings matter to me.”
- ... “I hear you, and it makes sense now that you’d feel that way.”

EXPRESSING DIFFICULT FEELINGS

Sometimes feedback is simply about sharing feelings, not asking for change. These moments invite empathy and connection — not solutions.

... “When you don’t call to check in, I feel worried.”

... “When you interrupt me, I feel unheard.”

... “When you don’t acknowledge my efforts, I feel unappreciated.”

... “When you leave chores unfinished, I feel overwhelmed.”

... “When you forget important dates, I feel unimportant.”

... “It’s hard for me when conversations end abruptly.”

... “I’m disappointed by how we handled that situation.”

... “I feel lonely sometimes, even when we’re together.”

... “I’m feeling anxious about how things have been lately.”

Hard feelings don’t have to come out harsh. Honesty lands best when wrapped in care.

Choose words that match the moment—not just how you feel, but how you want to be heard.

The right words don’t just communicate; they connect.

REQUEST FOR CHANGE

These statements invite collaboration and growth. Framing a request with care increases the chance it will be heard as a desire to grow together.

... “Feeling heard is really important to me—I want to know we can understand each other.”

... “Could we create a routine where we have more one-on-one time?”

... “Trust and honesty mean a lot to me—can we be more open about what’s on our minds?”

... “I’d really appreciate it if you could help with bedtime more often.”

... “Can we figure out a better way to divide chores?”

... “I’d like us to be more intentional about screen-free time.”

... “Can we work on being more affectionate during the week?”

... “Would it be possible to schedule regular check-ins, just the two of us?”

... “I’d love it if we could talk more openly about finances.”

... “Could you ask me before making plans that affect both of us?”

... “I need more encouragement from you when I’m trying something hard.”

... “Would you be open to...?”

... “Could we try...?”

... “Do you think it might help if...?”

... “How do you feel about...?”

... “Would it work if...?”

... “Can we explore...?”

... “What if we...?”

... “Shall we consider...?”

... “How about ...?”

... “How would you feel ...?”

... “What are your thoughts about ...?”

... “What do you think about ...?”