

Constructive Conflict Process

Adapted from What Makes Love Last – John Gottman

Speaking and Listening – Take turns until both feel heard and understood.

Speaking:

Speak the truth in love

- Your goal is to give your partner a blueprint for succeeding with you
- State your thoughts, feelings and perceptions of a situation in a spirit of love and respect
- Stay out of the nasty box – being judgmental, critical, or mean
- Avoid pushing buttons in areas of sensitivities. Goal is to have your partner hear you without provoking defensiveness – feeling attacked
- There is no such thing as constructive criticism here. Instead, identify and express your needs and wishes rather than complaints.
- What is the wish or need underneath your feeling? Example: You may be feeling angry because your partner stayed out late with work friends while you were at home dealing with a sick child. Rather than “you are so selfish!”, state your wish or need “I wish you would have considered that I needed your help with our child and had come home earlier” “I need to feel like we are partners in taking care of our kids”
- Avoid negative attributions, which means assuming you know your partners intent or assuming a negative intent. Instead, give your partner a chance to tell you the intentions behind his or her behavior. Try to remember there may be a positive intent or at least neutral intent rather than assuming the intent was to hurt you or make your life miserable.

Listening:

Seek first to understand:

- Your goal is to hear and appreciate your partners feelings
- Focus on hearing and understanding your partners concerns rather than on rebuttal or on solving the problem. Listen for feelings, not facts
- Listen for the meaning attached to the feelings you hear
- Validate the feelings and partner’s point of view. You may not agree with the perceptions or the facts but do not argue about the feelings.
- Soothe yourself as a listener to avoid becoming defensive. Take a deep breath and remember this is just your partner’s point of view and feelings
- Remember that this is a person you love and care about
- It may help to take notes and write down what you hear, what are the feelings and the themes. Write down your own feelings as you listen.

- You may ask probing questions to make sure you fully understand what you are hearing but do it with respect.
- Ask your partner to continue until he or she has fully stated all the feelings and concerns about the situation
- Check your understanding of your partner's perceptions and feelings to make sure he or she feels like you get it.

Problem solving:

Creating a better outcome

- After you have attuned to one another and both feel understood, now look for a compromise or a new resolution
- Write down what your core needs are on this issue. What are things you feel you cannot change or compromise on?
- What are your common goals and interests regarding the issue?
- What can you modify about your position?
- Where are you willing to compromise?
- What are the strengths or good points of each position? Can you combine the best of each position and come up with a new solution that meets the core desires for each of you?
- If there is no compromise right now, can you accept and respect your differences? Is this an issue you can choose to live with?

Repairing after a hurtful situation or conflict. Remember to use the above guidelines

1. Recall and name your emotions during the conflict
2. Discuss the subjective reality of both partners
3. Identify your deeper triggers
4. Recount the history attached to your triggers
5. Take responsibility for your contribution to the conflict and sincerely apologize
6. Accept the apology of one another
7. Talk about how to make it better next time. Come up with at least one way you can each make it better.