

## *During*

### A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

John Gottman says, “94% of the time, the way a discussion starts determines the way it will end.”

#### **Adopt the Team Mentality**

If you feel like you’re always fighting against each other, and not for a common goal, you may need to practice the team mentality.

Instead of becoming hyper-focused on your partner's flaws or mistakes, adopt a team mindset to shift the perspective from blame to cooperation. By recognizing that you and your partner are on the same side, working towards shared objectives, you can foster an environment of mutual support and understanding. When challenges arise, you'll approach them as a united front, seeking solutions together rather than engaging in the blame game.

#### **REMIND YOURSELF DURING AN ARGUMENT:**

1. When you want to blame, remember that you and your partner are on the same team.
2. Rather than assuming negative intentions, practice open and non-judgmental dialogue.
3. **Actively listen to your partner's perspective, validate their feelings, and express empathy.**

#### **Self-Soothe if You Need to**

Ever feel overwhelmed during an argument? You may be feeling flooded. Flooding is a sensation of feeling psychologically and physically overwhelmed during conflict, making it impossible to have a productive conversation.

*When emotions start to take over or you stop - “Hearing and understanding each other”*

**SO HOW CAN YOU OVERCOME OVERWHELM?**

*SELF-SOOTHING IS THE ANSWER.*

1

#### **Communicate**

to your partner that you’re going to take a short break from the conflict.

2

#### **Practice doing an activity that calms you**

for at least twenty minutes. This could be something like reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music.

3

#### **When you feel calmed,**

communicate that you are ready to re-join the conversation.

## Give and Receive Repair Attempts

You're in the middle of an argument with your partner, and all of the sudden they say, "I didn't realize that's how you felt about \_\_\_\_." Your partner just attempted a repair. What do you say back to them? Does this statement lead you to resolve the problem?

### REPAIR ATTEMPTS IN THE MIDST OF CONFLICT CONVERSATIONS CAN BE DIFFICULT TO RECOGNIZE. *THEY CAN SOUND LIKE...*

- I just need this to be calmer right now
- Can I take that back?
- I need your support right now
- Let me try again
- I'm sorry
- I messed up, I can see my part in this
- I want to say this more gently but I don't know how to
- I know this isn't your fault
- Thank you for sharing this with me
- Let's talk about something else for a few minutes
- I had no idea
- I see your point
- I understand
- I love you

A repair attempt is any statement or action—verbal, physical, or otherwise—meant to diffuse negativity and keep a conflict from escalating out of control. During a difficult conversation, you and your partner should utilize and also be open to accepting repair attempts. This helps to keep the conversation on track and reinforces your mutual respect and love for each other.

## Acknowledge Underlying Dreams

A lot of the time, what you're arguing about isn't the actual issue. It's often something underlying driving the conflict. Reflecting on arguments they've had, many couples will say, "I don't even remember why it started," or, "It was over nothing." Arguments and conflict may begin to feel frustrating or unresolved for you.

There is a reason you're arguing with your partner. Dreams, deeply held values, and beliefs lie at the root of every conflict you and your partner have, even if it seems silly at first.

For example, you might dismiss a squabble over who gets to pick the movie for date night as

"fighting about nothing." But, if you investigate why it turned into a tiff at all, you might remember that your opinion or taste was often dismissed by your family growing up. Or maybe your partner is feeling like they aren't being heard in the relationship or don't have an equal say.

Next time you find you and your partner arguing about "nothing," consider that it might actually be "something" and take the opportunity to learn, to connect, and to understand. Ask them about their feelings, ask them why they are upset, ask them what's going on... and really listen.

# Relationship Recipes

Try three of our favorite recipes for productive conflict management and a happy, healthy relationship!

## RECIPE

### Self-Soothing

*Physiologically flooded?  
Need a break from the conversation?  
The perfect chill can be achieved with this  
research-inspired self-soothing recipe.*



#### Ingredients:

- 1 Hand signal or code word to signify flooding  
Distance for at least 20 minutes
- 1 Favorite place, calming thought, or soothing activity  
Deep breaths

## YIELDS

*Physiological soothing, calm, and the ability to rejoin the conversation.*

## Instructions:

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### Step 1

First, identify if you're feeling flooded. Flooding has a number of indicators, including increased heart rate, irregular breathing, and fight-or-flight response.

### Step 2

If you're feeling flooded, communicate this to your partner with words, a neutral hand sign, or code word.

### Step 3

Take a break from the conflict for at least 20 minutes. This is how much time it takes to calm your body, according to science.

### Step 4

Practice focusing on your breath. It should be deep, regular, and even. Usually when you get flooded, you either hold your breath a lot or breathe shallowly. So, inhale and exhale naturally.

### Step 5

Practice doing an activity that calms you for at least twenty minutes. This could be something like reading a book, going for a walk, or listening to music.

### Step 6

Once calm, you are ready to resume the conflict conversation. Return to the conversation and approach resolution with your partner.