

How to Bring Up a Hard Conversation Without It Blowing Up – Checklist

Use this before the conversation to prepare, and during it when things start to go sideways.

Before You Start

- ☐ ☐ I've chosen a moment when neither of us is already stressed about something else
- ☐ ☐ I'm not doing this right after she walked in the door or right before bed
- ☐ ☐ I know the one thing I want to address -- not a list, one thing
- ☐ ☐ I know what I want from this conversation (understanding, not winning)
- ☐ ☐ I can stay in the room if it gets uncomfortable

What To Say First

- ☐ ☐ Name my state briefly: "There's something I've been wanting to bring up"
- ☐ ☐ Name what I want from the conversation: "I'm not looking to argue -- I just want us to understand each other"
- ☐ ☐ Give her a choice about timing: "Is now okay, or would later this week be better?"
- ☐ ☐ If this is a recurring topic: "I know we've tried this before. I want to try it differently this time."

What To Watch For

- ☐ ☐ Her body language in the first 30 seconds -- is she tightening or relaxing?
- ☐ ☐ My own voice volume -- am I staying level?
- ☐ ☐ The urge to stack a second issue onto the first
- ☐ ☐ Her silence -- is it hostile or is she just orienting?

What To Do

- ☐ ☐ Let her finish before I make my point
- ☐ ☐ If a second issue comes up: "I want to talk about that too -- can we finish this one first?"
- ☐ ☐ If it starts escalating: "I can feel this getting heated. Can we slow down for a second?"
- ☐ ☐ Stay physically present even if I have nothing to say right now

What Not To Do

- ☐ ☐ Don't use "always" or "never"
- ☐ ☐ Don't stack multiple grievances in one conversation
- ☐ ☐ Don't raise the topic when she's clearly exhausted or distracted
- ☐ ☐ Don't abandon the conversation mid-way without naming it and committing to a return time
- ☐ ☐ Don't use the opener as a setup for an immediate accusation

Repair Move

If it blows up:

- ☐ ☐ Re-enter sooner rather than days later
- ☐ ☐ Short re-entry: "I don't want yesterday to stay between us. Can we acknowledge it was hard and try again when we're ready?"
- ☐ ☐ Own my part specifically: "I came in too hot" or "I brought it up at the wrong moment"
- ☐ ☐ Don't wait for her to own her part first

Success Check

- ☐ ☐ She engaged with the topic without immediately shutting down
- ☐ ☐ The conversation ended without escalating to a full fight
- ☐ ☐ Within 24 hours there was at least one small moment of normal connection between us