

The Rules

For Constructive Conflict

based on the Gottman-Rapoport Intervention

Goal of Conflict: heal emotional wounds and learn to process fights and regrettable incidents.

1. Take turns as Speaker and Listener—10-20 minutes each. There are two subjective realities, and *both are right*.
2. Eliminate the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse:
 - Criticism:** of personality, identity
(antidote – a gentle start-up)
 - Defensiveness:** manifests as counterattack or playing the innocent victim
(antidote – accept responsibility)
 - Contempt:** speaking from a superior place
(antidote – build a culture of appreciation and respect)
 - Stonewalling:** shutting down because of physiological overload
(antidote – learn self-soothing and take breaks)
3. Start as neutrally as possible. Both must feel safe and open. Both must down-regulate physiologically, and interrupt the discussion if heart-rate goes up, etc. Empathy, rational thought, and ability to communicate vanish in the fight-or-flight mode.
4. “What’s this?” attitude vs. “What the hell is this?” attitude.
5. **Speaker’s job** – no blaming, use “I” statements, state feelings and positive needs. State position thoroughly, with depth and background. Use the following pattern:
 - “When _____ happens,
 - I feel _____,
 - I think (perceive) _____,
 - I want _____.”
6. **Listener’s job** – take notes, summarize and validate Speaker’s position. Ask questions about the history and deeper meaning in the partner’s position. Validate emotions even if disagree with position.
7. Postpone persuasion and problem-solving until *both* people can state his/her partner’s position to the partner’s satisfaction.

Six Skills to Develop and Use During Conflict:

1. Soften startup
2. Accept influence
3. Make effective repairs during conflict, and accept repair attempts from partner
4. De-escalate conflict (take breaks)
5. Compromise
6. Physiological soothing