

When You’re Afraid to Say It

A soulful, practical guide to prepare for a conversation that matters

It’s not just about what you say.
It’s also about the energy you bring.

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BEGIN WITH PRESENCE

1. Notice what you’re bringing

Time with people we love can bring us close—and bring up feelings we haven’t quite resolved.

Perhaps there’s something you want to say to someone you love. An old hurt still lingers. You feel judged. Or you need to set a boundary yet worry about disappointing someone.

You don’t need perfect words to begin. You need presence.

Give yourself a little space to understand what’s happening within you and choose how you want to show up. Bring one specific conversation to mind as you work through this guide.

Before you focus on their possible reaction, pause and notice yourself.

The energy you bring shows up in your tone, pace, expression, and willingness to listen. Even “I just want to talk” can sound like an invitation or a challenge.

Take a few comfortable breaths. Notice any tension without forcing it away.

Ask yourself:
• What am I feeling as I imagine this conversation?
• Am I preparing to understand, defend myself, or prove a point?
• How do I want to show up—even if we disagree?

My intention for this conversation is:

You can feel hurt or anger and still speak with love. You can be warm and still be firm.

LOOK A LITTLE CLOSER

2. Separate what happened from what you assumed

When a relationship carries history, a simple comment can awaken an entire story.

Start with what you actually observed: the words spoken or the action taken. Then notice the meaning you added.

For example:

What happened: My mother asked, “You’re really not coming to the family gathering?”

What I assumed: She thinks I’m selfish and doesn’t respect my choices.

Your interpretation may make total sense to you, yet it may not be true. It helps to check your assumption before treating it as fact.

What I saw or heard:

The story I’m telling myself:

What I don’t yet know:

You might say:

“When you asked me that, I interpreted it as you judging me and my decision, and I naturally wanted to go into defensive mode. What exactly were you hoping to understand?”

Curiosity creates room for information you may not have considered.

EXPRESS AND UNDERSTAND

3. Speak from your own experience

Ownership language helps you express your experience without claiming to know someone else’s motives.

Instead of: “You always judge my decisions.”

Try: “When my decision is questioned several times, I feel tense and want to defend myself. Would you like to hear more about my choice, even if you would choose differently?”

A useful starting point is:

“When [specific words or action], I feel [emotion]. What I want is [need or value]. Would you be willing to [specific request]?”

Use it as a guide. Let the words sound like you.

What I want to express:

Before speaking, read it aloud. Notice your tone. Does it carry the intention you chose?

4. Make room for curiosity

You can express your truth and make room for theirs.

Try one sincere question:
• “How do you remember what happened?”
• “What would you like me to understand?”
• “When you say that, what do you mean?”

Listen long enough to hear the answer. You don’t have to agree with it to understand it more clearly.

If an old resentment surfaces, you might begin:
“Something from the past still feels unresolved for me. I’d like to share my experience and hear your perspective. Is this a good time?”

CARE FOR YOURSELF

5. Choose a boundary you can follow through on

A request asks someone to do something. A boundary clarifies what you will do to care for yourself.

Request: “I would appreciate it if you would stop commenting on my relationship.”

Boundary: “If they continue, I’ll step away from the conversation.”

You might say: “I know you have concerns and I’m choosing not to discuss this decision over dinner.”

Say it with a smile and follow through. Do Not Discuss over dinner.

My boundary is:

If needed, the action I will take is:

Choose an action you can realistically carry out. You can acknowledge someone’s disappointment and keep your boundary.

MAKE ROOM FOR THE MOMENT

6. Give the conversation a suitable time and place

A family gathering doesn’t have to become the setting for every unresolved issue.

Consider:
• Can we speak privately?
• Am I ready to listen as well as speak?
• Would another day give us more room?

You can say: “This is important to me, and I’d like to give it more space than we have right now. Could we find another time?”

If emotions rise: “I’m feeling overwhelmed. I’d like to pause and come back to this when I can listen more fully.”

Your thoughtful approach can support a conversation. It cannot determine another person’s response.

CARRY IT WITH YOU

Your small shift

Before the conversation, choose one practice:

I will pause, check an assumption, speak from my experience, ask a curious question, or follow through on a boundary.

Afterward, reflect:

What did I learn about myself?

What would I like to practice next?

Give yourself credit for the choice you made with awareness—even if the conversation was imperfect.

Prepare with support

Is there a conversation you would like to have, yet don’t know what to say or how to say it?

A coaching session offers space to explore what’s underneath your reaction, clarify what you want to express, and practice saying it in words that feel true to you.

A little preparation. A different conversation.

Learn the skills that have the power to improve the conversations that matter!

Visit MeishaKey.com.

Before You Speak

A moment of awareness before a conversation that matters

It’s not just about what you say. It’s also about the energy you bring.

Take a few comfortable breaths. Let this be a place to get honest with yourself, without judging what you discover.

Who do I want to speak with, and what do I want to address?

1. Notice your energy

What am I feeling? How might it show up in my tone or body language?

What would help me be present and grounded; to speak and listen with intention?

2. Separate the moment from the story

What actually happened? Write the specific words or actions you observed.

What meaning am I giving it? Notice assumptions about their motives.

3. Choose your intention

What matters most to me in this conversation?

☐ Understanding each other ☐ Expressing a hurt ☐ Setting a boundary
☐ Making a request ☐ Something else: _____

How do I want to show up? Choose a quality you can practice.

4. Find your words

Try: “When _____, I feel _____. What I want is _____. Would you be willing to _____?”

In my own words:

5. Make room for curiosity

What could I ask instead of assuming I already know?

6. Know your boundary—and your timing

If I need a boundary, what will I do to care for myself?

Is this a suitable time and place? ☐ Yes ☐ I’ll suggest another time

If I need to pause: “This is important to me. I need a little time so I can listen more fully.”

My one small shift

Before or during this conversation, I will:

You can be loving and firm. You can feel hurt and speak thoughtfully. You can prepare yourself with clarity and confidence. Let go of trying to control their response.