

Creating Agreements for Disagreements

A guide to fair, respectful, values-aligned conflict



NEW PATHS COUNSELLING

Every relationship — romantic, family, friendship, or professional — will face moments of tension. Conflict isn't a sign that something is wrong; it's a sign that two humans with different needs, histories, and perspectives are trying to stay connected.

What *does* create harm is **how** we handle conflict.

This handout offers a simple way to create “**agreements for disagreements**” — shared guidelines that help conversations stay respectful, grounded, and productive, even when emotions run high.

These agreements aren't about perfection. They're about protecting the relationship while still honouring your own needs and values.

1. Start With Shared Intentions

Before creating any rules, it helps to name what you both want during conflict.

Common intentions include:	
Staying connected even when we disagree	Listening to understand, not to win
Protecting emotional safety	Repairing quickly when things go off track
Speaking honestly without causing harm	Other _____

Your shared intention: _____

2. Choose Your “Fair Fighting” Agreements

Below are common agreements couples or individuals use. You can choose the ones that fit or add your own.

Communication Agreements

- We speak from “I” statements, not accusations.
- We take turns — one speaks, one listens.
- We avoid name-calling, insults, or character attacks.
- We stay with the issue at hand (no piling on old hurts).
- We avoid mind-reading or assuming motives.

Emotional Safety Agreements

- We take breaks when needed and return at an agreed time. We don't raise our voices or use threatening body language.
- We pause if either person becomes overwhelmed.
- We avoid sarcasm, mockery, or dismissive comments.

Clarity and Repair Agreements

- We summarize what we heard before responding.
- We ask clarifying questions instead of assuming.
- We apologize when we've crossed a line.
- We revisit the conversation when both people are regulated.

Agreements we choose: _____

These agreements are about caring for each other and the relationship while still being able to communicate what is important.

3. Create a Plan for Taking Breaks

Breaks aren't avoidance — they're regulation.

A good break plan includes:

- **How we'll signal we need a break:**
("I'm getting overwhelmed — I need 10 minutes.")
- **How long the break will last:**
(10-30 minutes is usually enough.)
- **What we'll do during the break:**
(Breathing, walking, grounding — not rehearsing arguments.)
- **When we'll return to the conversation:**
(A specific time, not "later.")

Our break plan: _____

4. Identify Your Values For Conflict

Connecting with our values can help guide our actions, even during conflict and difficult emotional situations.

Common conflict values		
respect	kindness	honesty
fairness	courage	understanding
connection	other _____	

The values I want to bring into conflict are: _____

5. What Happens When We Break an Agreement?

Conflict is messy. Agreements will be broken sometimes.

What matters is **repair**, not perfection.

You might agree to:

- Pause and reset
- Acknowledge the rupture
- Offer a brief apology
- Return to the shared intention
- Try again with more gentleness

Our repair plan: _____

6. A Gentle Reminder

Healthy conflict isn't about avoiding discomfort and it's not about being perfect either— it's about staying aligned with who you want to be, even when emotions are strong.

Agreements for disagreements help you:

- slow down
- stay grounded
- protect the relationship
- communicate more clearly
- repair more quickly

You don't have to fight perfectly.
You just have to fight *fairly*.

And when disagreements go off-track (and sometimes they will),
The REPAIR after RUPTURE can make a big difference.

Wishing you growth and connection together



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