

A lot of stuff gets printed about communication for couples. However, effective communication on a sensitive topic requires just FOCUS. That's right. Focus on two things and your communication success will soar.

Do this and you will look like star graduates of the Dale Carnegie school of How to Win Friends and Influence Your Spouse.

Imagine this scenario: You can no longer avoid a high twitch or volatile topic and you are sick of discussions going nowhere. You've had it with constantly arguing, or never getting lasting results. It could be parenting, money, sex, chores or anything else that has a negative history.

This time you are determined the conversation will be different. The stakes are high. You both realize you are on the same team and not adversaries. Now you can apply soothing aloe to the burn of high stress conversations.

Here is what you each do. Decide on a topic. Take an index card or sheet of paper. Write down how you want your partner to feel after the discussion. Simply write the qualities (not the actions) you hope they would feel. For example, respected, loved, accepted, considered, etc.

On the other side, write down how you would need to be in order for you partner to feel that way. For example, you might write, I need to be compassionate, a good listener, open, tactfully direct, respectful, etc.

Then go ahead and have your discussion. This discussion doesn't need to have a resolution to count as a success (although it may happen spontaneously). You are changing the way you talk about a difficult topic. The negotiation comes later if the topic needs to be negotiated. Remember, you are creating a major breakthrough by changing the process of how you discuss a tough topic. This will guide you through many problem discussions in the future.

If you push too fast for a solution you are simply responding to your own impatient anxiety,

which messes up even the best intentions to change the way you talk about a topic.

This communication tool is the fine art of cooperation at its best. Cooperation and consideration are the heart of resolving any conflict. By focusing on how you want your partner to feel at the end of the dialogue, you are opening yourself up to a different kind of negotiation tactic. You're adding a new tool in your toolbox.

There you have it. Focus on how you want your partner to feel and focus on how you will bring that about. The more you do your part, the easier it is for your partner to do his part. Each of you commits to try this experiment at least three times.

If you don't like it, you can always go back to the old ways. But remember, each of you must make the commitment to what you wrote down. Otherwise it won't work.

Don't point fingers if your partner is not perfect. Give credit for trying something different.

It is simple (I didn't say easy) when you focus on the right things.

Do it and congratulate each other for breaking your old patterns and feeling better at the finish line.