



Ways to manage conversations without feeling judged, giving up or becoming overwhelmed.

Managing conversations can be exhausting particularly if you feel attacked. Some people have to “win” a conversation or argument and will continue talking until they get their way, or you give in out of exhaustion. It’s often easier and less painful to stay quiet or agree. The following ideas might help you to feel a little more in control of any conversations you have.

**Diana Rickman**

Understanding the Blues

Very often people who would describe themselves as feeling depressed or suffering from the 'blues' also report feeling unheard or unable to express how they truly feel either to a partner, their children or in a work setting. Managing an opinionated colleague at work or an argumentative teenager at home is exhausting particularly if you feel unsupported. Some people have to "win" an argument and will continue talking until they get their way or you give in out of exhaustion. It's often easier and less painful to stay quiet. Or perhaps you're overwhelmed by the well-intentioned advice and suggestions from friends and family who know just what you need to 'feel better'. Whatever the situation the following ideas just might help you to feel a little more in control of any conversations you have and whilst we can't change others when we change how we react to them it does help us feel better about ourselves and that's always a good thing.

These ideas are intended as a suggestion. I hope that you will read one or two and think I could adapt that to my situation. *Please seek further help, advice and support if you are dealing with someone who has non-neurotypical behaviour or is abusive towards you.*

## Reconciliation gestures

Reconciliation gestures tell the other person that you are listening to them and are interested and engaged in what they are saying.

It can be hard to do this if you feel attacked. But if you make an effort to minimise argumentative body language and use reconciliation gestures, it can help to make confrontation less.

**Smile** – Not a great big cheesy grin but more Mona Lisa. It gives the impression of a neutral or unflustered state and has the added advantage of helping you to feel calm or less provoked.

**Open body** - Crossed arms and legs mean you are close off to what your partner is saying. So do the opposite. Face your partner, don't cross your arms or legs and keep your palms faced upwards. All these suggest you are receptive to what's being said.

**Sit down** - Ideally, both of you should sit down when having a difficult conversation. Generally, a greater height gives a body language advantage. Height tends to command respect, but it can be a disadvantage. If you are being loomed over it can seem very threatening. Sitting so you are around the same size suggests you see eye-to-eye, whereas lowering your body so that you are smaller is a submissive gesture.

**Make eye contact** - When we are arguing we almost always turn our head away so that we are not looking at the other person. It can feel uncomfortable but try and look the other person in the eyes when you are arguing. It tells him or her that you are listening. What's

more, you are both less likely to say mean spirited things if you are looking directly at each other. Think of it as your “serious discussion pose.”

**Mirror their body language** – Humans like to mirror body language we can’t help ourselves. Think about the last time someone you were talking to started scratching their face, touched their nose or crossed their arms. You likely copied them. Mirroring someone's body language makes them feel accepted and creates a bond and is something that occurs naturally between friends and people of equal status. ... Mirroring the other person's body language and speech patterns is one of the most powerful ways to build rapport quickly. Mirroring is a technique that can work well in any workplace as well as in most interpersonal relationships. With mirroring, one person adopts the physical and verbal behaviours of another as a way to build rapport and agreement.

**Sit side by side** – Often difficult conversations are easier to navigate if we sit beside rather than facing each other.

**Giving fair warning** – Let the person you want to have a difficult conversation with know you would like to talk about something and make a mutually agreeable time to do this.

**Practice** – Talk to your cat/dog an empty chair or pillow. Look at yourself in a mirror or record yourself speaking on your phone (or video if you’re feeling very brave) Hearing the words we want to say out loud gives us a chance to practice but also get used to asking for the outcome or agreement we want.

**Be prepared to adapt** – The discussion may not go the way you planned or wanted. That’s ok and not down to you failing just that there are at least two people in a discussion and you can’t control how they react or respond. If you have some alternative outcomes that you are comfortable accepting there can be. Room for discussion without you feeling unheard or overwhelmed.

**Consider another point of view** – Even if you are right or have the best solution give some thought to how the other person may see it. You can’t get inside their head it’s true but taking a step towards how they feel will allow you to show some compassion for their viewpoint. *But be careful not to tell them you know how they feel.*

**Hold hands** - If a heated discussion is beginning to cool off, try reaching out and touching an arm or holding hands. If you are still in the thick of the conflict, this won’t work and may be perceived as a manipulative gesture to force agreement.

**Posture** - People who are sorry generally slope their shoulders and bow their heads. There's no need to slump, but using this pose while apologising is a good idea. However, even if your head is slightly declined, you should still look directly at your partner.

## Some ways to reply to argumentative or challenging statements.

### 1. What I heard you say is...

Most people get angry when they feel dismissed, ignored, or misunderstood. That's why repeating back what someone has told you (ideally in your own words) is one of the best ways there is to keep a conversation from turning hostile. You've just made it clear that you care about the other person's viewpoint and want to understand it. Even better, if someone said something they didn't mean, or what you heard wasn't what was intended, they get the chance to set the record straight.

### 2. What's your biggest concern?

Many people instinctively avoid naming their worst fears. That means the other person may be afraid about something you're not even aware of. Asking them to tell you what worries them the most means you may be able to alleviate those fears. Once again, it tells them you care about what they care about.

### 3. What do you need right now?

Again, you've shown you care about their needs. You've also opened the door to finding a constructive compromise, since solving their most immediate problems may give you the time and goodwill to find a bigger, more permanent solution.

### 4. What would make you happy?

This is the bigger-picture version of the previous question. Asking someone what would make them happy tells them you care about their happiness. And you'll often be surprised at how something relatively simple may make all the difference.

### 5. I'm afraid of...

You've asked the other person to voice his or her greatest fears. You should do the same because chances are those fears are driving you into the argument you seek to avoid. And once you've spoken them out loud you may learn that those fears are unfounded. *Play around with this one and number 6 as it may just enable a need for control in your partner.*

### 6. I'm sad because...

It's all too easy to mistake sadness for anger, and vice versa. So if you feel like you're heading for an argument, or you find yourself getting angry, stop for a moment and ask yourself if you're reacting to a feeling instead. Telling someone else what you're sad about--like saying what you're afraid of--means that you're willing to let down your defences and be honest. They may react by doing the same.

## 7. Let's take a break until...

Sometimes all you need to avoid an argument is a little time apart to get over feeling angry and get a fresh perspective. Taking a break until later that day, or the following morning can be a great way to accomplish this. But make sure to specify a time when you would like to resume the conversation. Otherwise, you risk leaving conflicts unresolved and resentments simmering. Or the other party can think they have won!

## 8. What if...?

For almost every situation there's a potential solution sometimes it can be out of the box and sometimes really simple.

## 9. Do we need to agree about this?

I don't need you to believe what I believe--I just need us to find a course of action we can both accept. Next time you find yourself trapped in a debate about ideology or principle, ask yourself if you can find a solution that would satisfy both parties, without either convincing the other that they're right.

## 10. I'm sorry to hear that.

Said with the right tone it conveys that you are listening and have empathy

## 11. I can see why you might think that.

You're listening but not agreeing. Likely the speaker won't pick that up as they feel listened to and validated. This type of reply is good if the other person is being unreasonable and trying to push your buttons

## 12. I'm sorry you feel that way

You're not taking responsibility for how they feel just showing empathy

## 13. You could be right.

Not agreeing but everyone likes to feel they are right.

## 14. Well, I suppose that's possible.....!

If you're being accused of something and it's a well-worn argument or judgement from another person.

## 15. A nod a smile and a gesture

It's not what you say but how you say it. Try adding in a movement that allows you to shake off some of the frustration of being challenged.