



The Calming Conversation

The *calming conversation* is a technique to use when you are feeling upset or angry and are struggling to talk through an issue. The purpose of this guide is to structure your conversation so that you focus on hearing what the other person is saying, rather than trying to resolve the issue. Most conflict comes from trying to solve an issue. We get so busy trying to “fix” things that we forget to slow down and listen. The calming conversation structures your discussion so that both of you will get a chance to be heard and to ask for the change you’d like.

| Step | Person 1 | Person 2 |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| 1 Set up a Meeting | Ask for a meeting with your partner to talk about an issue that is upsetting you. | Agree to meet with your partner at the first available time that works for you both. |
| 2 Speak Simply | Say a simple sentence that begins with the word “I” and describes a thought or a feeling. | Listen to your partner’s thoughts; focus on hearing the feelings that are being expressed. |
| 3 Paraphrase | Pause and allow your partner to summarize. | Paraphrase the concern your partner expressed and ask for confirmation that you “got it right.” |
| 4 Elaborate and Clarify | Clarify and elaborate upon anything that your partner shared when summarizing; if anything was not accurate, explain how and why. | Summarize any new information; continue steps 3 and 4 until Person 1 has fully expressed their idea. |
| 5 Acknowledge and Validate | Acknowledge that what you said, thought, and felt was accurately communicated. | Validate your partner’s message by expressing that you can understand their subjective reality. You might say, “I can see how you’d feel _____, if you thought that _____.” |
| 6 Empathize | Listen to your partner as he/she is expressing empathy. | Empathize with your partner’s feelings as he/she is describing them. For example, you might say, “I can imagine how anxious you might have felt.” Do not try to correct, argue, or disagree; just resonate the feelings. |
| 7 Thank and Ask for Change | Express appreciation; Ask for the change you want in a friendly way. | Listen to what your partner asks for; Respond to the request in a kind, reassuring way. |
| 8 Switch and Repeat | Switch roles and repeat. | Switch roles and repeat. |