

[Dr. John Gottman of the Gottman Research Institute] has discovered that in all conflict, the creation of constructive conflict management includes the development of the following six skills:

1. Soften Startup
2. Accept Influence
3. Make Effective Repairs During Conflict
4. De-escalate
5. Psychological Soothing of Self and Partner
6. Compromise

As his research has revealed, discussions invariably end on the same note they begin. If you start an argument too harshly by attacking your partner verbally, you will end up with at least as much tension as you began with. What we will share with you today will give you a few tools to avoid falling into this trap.

Soften Startup. How a partner raises an issue in the first three minutes of the conversation is crucial to resolving relationship conflicts. If most of your arguments start softly, your relationship is far more likely to be stable and happy.

Complain but don't blame. No matter how "at fault" you feel that your partner is, approaching them with criticisms and accusations is not productive. According to Dr. Gottman, it's all about approach!

- Instead of **blaming your partner** with "You said you would clean the backyard today and it's still a mess," try a simple complaint: "Hey, there are still some fallen leaves in the gutter and tennis balls everywhere. We agreed you'd rake and clean up after Buster. I'm really upset about this."

Make statements that start with "I" instead of "You." When you start sentences with "I" you are less likely to seem (or be!) critical, immediately putting your partner into a defensive position. Instead of saying "You are not listening to me," you can say, "I don't feel like you are listening right now." Instead of "You're so careless with money," say, "I think that we should try to save more."

- Focus on how you're feeling, not on accusing your spouse! Both of you will stand to gain something from the conversation – the two of you will likely feel that you are hearing and understanding each other more.

Describe what is happening, but don't evaluate or judge. Instead of accusing or blaming your partner, simply describe what you see in the situation. Though you may be at the end of your leash, keeping yourself in check will be worth it in the end! Instead of violently attacking with accusations, such as "You never watch the baby," try saying, "I seem to be the only one chasing after Charlie today. I'm really exhausted – could you help out with him?"

- Instead of lashing back out at you, your partner is more likely to consider your point of view and deliver the results you are hoping for with this approach. Be clear. No matter how long you have been with your partner or how well they know you, no matter how convenient it would be, you cannot expect them to read your mind.

Be polite and appreciative. Just because you are in conflict with your partner, does not mean that your respect and affection for them has to diminish! Adding phrases such as “please” and “I appreciate it when you...” can be helpful to maintaining warmth and emotional connection even during a difficult conversation. Which is, of course, exactly where you need it most.

Don't store things up! We've all been there: exhausted and overwhelmed, feeling like we are drowning in a whirlpool of problems... in this state, one issue leads to another, and we suddenly find ourselves bringing up a laundry list of issues (which all somehow feel related!

Generally, the issues we bring up in such conversations don't feel so related to our partners. Flooded with emotion, both partners are entirely incapable of reaching a resolution. As we all know, not doing the laundry regularly leaves you with an enormous mess. Don't wait forever to bring up an issue with your partner, and your conflict discussions will be far more productive. Don't let the situation escalate!

Lisitsa, Ellie. [THE GOTTMAN RELATIONSHIP BLOG](#) » MANAGE CONFLICT:
THE SIX SKILLS

