

Tips on having an understanding conversation

Make some time to have a conversation when each of you takes turns to speak while the other listens and asks questions. Like anything, both parties often get better at this with practice.

- Be aware it is not about getting the response from the other person that you may want. The aim is to be respectful, *regardless*.

Make listening your priority...

Pay attention and think carefully before saying anything.

Give support :

- Show genuine interest: ask questions.
- Communicate understanding: "what a bummer! I'd be stressed out too: I can understand why you feel that way".
- We against others: "that guy is a total jerk!"
- Solidarity: "this is our problem and we will face it together."
- Help person problem solve. "Let's figure this out"
 - But listen carefully first.
 - Don't rush to suggest solutions right away.
- My own experience is similar: "I can understand because..."
- Affection: "come here and let me hold you; I am totally on your side."

Respond to emotions:

- Interest: "tell me more about that" ask questions.
- Excitement: "wow! This is really hot stuff! Let's do it!"
- Sadness: "yeah, that is really so sad."
- Fear: "that is something that would have me worried too."
- Irritation & anger: "I can see why you'd be annoyed here." "I can change what I do in this situation."
- Don'ts:
 - Don't stonewall (delay or obstruct by refusing to answer or by being evasive)
 - Don't ignore or fail to respond
 - Don't get defensive
 - Don't criticize
 - Don't side with the enemy

When Speaking...

- Use 'I' statements: Say 'I' (instead of 'you' or 'they', which sounds like blaming)
- Know what you want to say and say it clearly: be specific and practice beforehand.
- Say what you feel – and what provoked your feelings
- Say what you would have preferred to happen - an alternative
- Start by practicing expressing emotions like hurt, anxiety or sadness before you express anger.
- Take care that what you say isn't interpreted as a blame and attack.

Based on Gottman's relationship strategies and MensLine's series on Anger Management