

Our Ground Rules for Difficult Conversations

How we want to handle difficult conversations

These are the rules we agree to come back to when things between us become difficult.

1 We keep things physically safe

We do not use physical force, threats or intimidation - including hitting, pushing, shoving or throwing things.

There is no excuse for physical violence or intimidation, whatever the provocation. However angry, hurt or frustrated we feel, we remain responsible for what we do.

If either of us needs to step away to keep things safe, we do that.

2 We do not shout

When we are on the receiving end of shouting, we stop listening properly. Our attention moves away from what is being said and towards the shouting itself.

So if we shout, we make it less likely that the other person will hear the very thing we most want them to understand. **We are more likely to be heard when we do not shout.**

We do not get caught up in arguing about whether something technically counts as shouting. If either of us feels voices are becoming too loud or the conversation is becoming heated, we lower them.

If we cannot listen and speak calmly enough to continue, we pause. **A pause is not a way of ending the disagreement or brushing the issue under the carpet.** We acknowledge that the conversation still needs to happen and agree when we will return to it.

The purpose of the pause is to help us come back better able to listen, speak clearly and work towards resolving the issue calmly together.

3 We do not insult or call each other names

We can disagree strongly without insulting, belittling or attacking each other personally.

Insults, put-downs and name-calling take us away from the issue we are trying to resolve and make it harder to hear one another.

We are both adults, and we remember this. We keep our attention on the issue in hand and talk about what has happened, rather than attacking the whole other person.

Something does not have to matter equally to both of us for it to deserve a respectful conversation.

4 We deal with one issue at a time

We stay with the issue we are trying to understand now. We do not bring in other disagreements or old hurts to strengthen our case, shift responsibility or prove who is more at fault.

If something from the past is still troubling either of us, it deserves attention in its own right rather than being pulled into another disagreement.

We are more likely to resolve things well when we attend to one thing at a time.

Our shared commitment

We agree to sign up to these rules now, and to help each other keep them, for the benefit of us both.

These agreements are for relationships where both people can speak, disagree and make choices freely and safely. Where there is coercion, intimidation, threats, violence or abuse, safety and appropriate specialist support take priority.