

CALM AND CONNECTED COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

WHAT YOU WANT

When it comes to communicating with your partner, your family, and those you love, what you want is to:

- Speak with kindness and patience
- Listen well
- Understand each other
- Give and receive support
- Hear and be heard by each other
- Get on the same page when it's time for action

To be able to communicate that way your brain has to be open and ready.

CALM IS THE KEY

In your body, stress and tension tell your brain there's danger around.

When there's danger, your brain's only job is to protect you.

In order to do that your brain turns on the "Fight, Flight, or Freeze" state. When it comes to communication, your brain protects you from danger by:

- Arguing or verbally attacking (Fight)
- Avoiding conversation (Flight)
- Shutting down (Freeze)

You really don't have much of a choice about whether or not you act this way when your brain is protecting you from danger. Your brain chooses to behave this way automatically, because it's protecting you.

So the key is for you to be calm, and to help your loved ones be calm, when you want a good conversation, in order to help your body and your brain feel safe.

CREATING SAFETY: NO SURPRISES!

The unexpected, being startled, being caught off guard, feeling surprised – all of these tell your body and brain there might be danger.

You and your loved ones need to feel prepared, in control, and like to know what to expect. That creates a feeling of safety and predictability. YOU can all play a part in creating this safety on your own, and together!

Be careful to always check with your loved ones to be sure they are prepared for whatever you want to share with them. It can be quite startling and distressing to listen to another person talk about feelings of anger, fear, irritation, or annoyance without being prepared and giving permission. Always ask first!

PLAN IN ADVANCE

Here's how to set up a conversation so you and your loved ones feel that sense of safety.

Any time you have something to talk about with your loved one that is important or heartfelt, take a few minutes by yourself to think it through. This is important – so that both you and your loved one feel prepared, calm, and in control, don't just blurt out what you're thinking. Plan in advance.

MINDSET PREPARATION & CLARITY

Ask yourself these questions in advance. For real!

This preparation is really important to help you feel most calm,
and to help your loved ones feel safe and calm as well.

A. What is **THE ONE FOCUS** you want to talk about?

Get clear in your mind **THE ONE FOCUS** you want to talk about. This will be the topic, or content, for your Calm & Focused Conversation. Choose only one, to keep your conversation calm and safe.

If you haven't already had this conversation, you're going to start with understanding and not solving or fixing anything. You can return and have several Calm & Focused Conversations about different parts of or goals for your topic. Keeping conversations to ONE FOCUS at a time feels controlled, safer and calmer.

B. How do you feel about this? Carefully think about an emotion you feel inside, not a thought about the other person, and avoid any blame. Some examples include:

- Afraid
- Confused
- Worried
- Hopeful
- Shy
- Inspired
- Hurt
- Disoriented
- (Your feeling)

C. What are your goals for this conversation? Keep it simple, and get clear.

- What do you want to have happen?
- What do you want all of you to do, or feel, or know by the end?
- What type of conversation do you want to have? (Types covered in some Dr. Sarah presentations)
- Do you want your loved one to just listen to you?
- Do you want to tell your partner an important piece of information?
- How do you want to feel? Heard, cherished, smart, important, cared for, safe?
- If you've already had some conversations and understand each other well - do you want to find a solution to a problem together?

D. What do you appreciate about your loved one(s) that is related to this subject?

Think of something between you that went well in the past that you appreciate. Remember some details.

E. When and where might be a good time and place for this conversation?

- Think of one or two good times coming up soon when you can talk without being interrupted, and you'll both have good energy - for example, not right before bed if you're usually too tired then.
- Think of a good place where you can both feel calm, happy, and relaxed.
- Come up with some ideas for times and places to suggest to your partner, and be prepared and flexible for your partner's suggestions of times and places that might work better for them.

Take the time to think about A-E above first, so you're ready for the next steps.

You'll need to use these prepared thoughts in your Set-Up Conversation

THE SET-UP CONVERSATION

BEFORE you and your partner or loved ones have your important conversation, you're going to have this **Set-Up Conversation** to be sure you both feel safe and ready. This may only take a few minutes, but even so, don't try to squeeze it in when either of you are rushing to get out of the house or are too distracted, tired, or hungry to listen.

1. Attention

Choose a time your loved one's attention is likely to be available. Say their name or touch their arm to get their attention, and wait for them to respond.

SAY: "Do you have a minute?"

If they say they're too busy, ask when they'll be available for just a couple of minutes, and return later.

2. Your Appreciation

Think about your appreciation for your partner or loved ones [**D** on previous page].

SAY: "Remember that time when you and I were talking about _____, and it was such a great conversation? I really appreciated how well you listened (or _____), and how you also shared your thoughts after you listened." Describe some details about that memory, that show what your partner did that you appreciate.

3. What You Want to Talk About

Think about the one thing you want to talk about [**A** on previous page] and the conversation you want to have about it with your partner.

SAY: "I've been thinking about _____, and I really want to talk about it."

4. How You Feel

Let your loved one know how you've been feeling [**B** on previous page].

SAY: "I've been feeling pretty _____ about it, and I would really like to have a good talk."

5. Your Clear, Specific Request

Think about your goal for this conversation [**C** on previous page] and let your loved one know. Let them know if you just want to be heard, or if you want to fix something, or if you want to hear them. Let them know how you'd like to feel afterwards. Then

SAY: (intro) "I would like to have a good conversation where we can take our time and listen to each other really well."

SAY: (time) "I want to talk for a while when we won't be interrupted by anything. Is _____ Day and Time [**E** on previous page] good for you?" and/or "When is a good time for you when you'll have some free time?"

SAY: (place) "I want to talk in a comfortable spot that feels good. How about _____?" and then give one or two suggestions from [**E** on previous page] and/or "Where is a good spot that feels comfortable for you?"

SAY: (format) "This is such a stressful time, I want to have a slow, calm talk together. Let's be sure we relax a little before we get started, and be sure to take time for some good deep breaths when we need to."

Clarify the time and place you've agreed on, and put it on your appointment calendars.

THE CALM & FOCUSED CONVERSATION

Whatever your specific ONE FOCUS is for your conversation, seek to understand each other first.

This means really listening to each other so you can see, hear, and understand *from your loved one's perspective*. When you listen closely and calmly, you'll likely have empathy for their position. Although you might not agree with them, you will be able to understand *what* they are thinking and feeling and *why*.

You want to listen so that if you were in their shoes, what they are saying makes sense given who they are, and their background. Ask gentle questions until it makes sense to you.

And here's the special thing about understanding – it's not an endorsement. You can understand your loved ones from their point of view, and know that it makes sense for them from their perspective, perhaps without agreeing with it.

THE CONVERSATION FORMAT

Almost Meeting Time

A little while before the time and place you've agreed on, pleasantly remind each other that your conversation time is approaching. Then each do something relaxing and enjoyable to arrive in a calm frame of mind.

Speaker and Listener Roles

Try out this lovely format. Talking in this way helps you stay calm, and feel safe sharing thoughts and feelings. One person will be the Speaker and the other the Listener; then you'll change roles. Decide together who's first. With one person at a time as the Speaker, this means that although the Listener may ask some brief, gentle questions, the Speaker will be the one fully exploring, explaining, and sharing your thoughts, feelings, and positions. The Speaker will continue your turn until you feel you've explored fully, and the Listener feels they are beginning to see, hear, and understand the Speaker.

The Listener will not share any of their own opinions or observations until it is their turn. Then when it is their turn they will share their own thoughts and feelings, not comment on or disagree with the first Speaker.

For Both of You

Don't try to solve the problem at first. It is much too soon to start with that. You first need to see, hear, and understand each other's thoughts and feelings as friends and supporters, and that's what you're doing in this conversation. Try to understand all the **thoughts and feelings** of each other, with generosity and compassion. Be interested in and cherish your loved ones and all their experiences.

A Final Thought

One Calm & Focused Conversation at a time can feel safe, calm, and controlled. It's a winning strategy to stop after each Speaker has had a turn and each Listener understands the speaker's perspective on ONE FOCUS. This will likely mean that you end some conversations without a solution, without fixing anything, without taking action. It's okay, and to be expected, to walk away without feeling "finished," and you each may feel new feelings and have new thoughts and questions. Every time you understand each other more is a success!

Take some time to think about the next conversation you want to have, to pick up where you left off. Start again with Mindset Preparation & Clarity, pick your next ONE FOCUS, think through your new goals, and get your loved one's attention to schedule your next Calm & Focused Conversation. You can stay calm together!