

Talking Points

Uncommon Phrases for Better Conversations

(Part 4) ---- By Gary Dahl

This lesson/handout may help you find the right words to express yourself when you don't know how to say something in a way that she can hear. **BEFORE** looking at the list, here are some things to think about in your conversations. These words and phrases are one thing, the intent behind them is another. When you read these words, ask yourself, what's the point of saying it this way? Why are we suggesting this specific way? Remember that God calls us to love our spouses. If you don't know how, just take a moment and ask Him to show you!

Ask yourself, if someone sincerely expresses themselves this way, what kind of heart would be behind that? Where is your heart in your conversations?

Most importantly, say everything with love. I often add the phrase "I love you" at the beginning of something that may be hard to hear. Use the words "honey", "sweetheart" (or your equivalent) as much as possible.

Things to think about in your conversations:

- *In your words, do not sin.*
- What's a good time to talk about the issue you want to discuss? Maybe not now.
- No matter what she says, it's *not* your job to change her or correct her, it's God's. Stay out of His way.
- Go Slow, be calm. Be a good listener!
- Listening is probably better than any words you might say. *Know when it's time to shut up.*
- Remember you are problem solving, not finding fault.
- Your tone of voice is *everything*. Watch it. Speak softly.
- You don't need to say everything you think or feel.
- Always be aware of your motivations.
- Words and phrases are just tools to express thoughts and ideas. They can be used to manipulate and control or to bring healing.
- This is about her reality, not yours. She is entitled to her interpretation of things.
- Check/reaffirm with her frequently ("Did I get that right?")
- You'll have an opportunity to express your side of things, maybe just not right now.
- Keep your interpretations and opinions to yourself unless she asks for them.
- Acknowledging her feelings is not the same thing as agreeing to what she says.
- *Ask* what you want to know, not *tell* her what you think she needs to hear.
- Always think about how you would like to be spoken to.
- Give her something to save face

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When you need to learn more or understand her feelings:

- Help me understand (shows interest in how she feels and what she wants)
- What's going on? (Notice her, you care about her)
- Do you want to talk about it? (Open a dialog, show that you care)
- How do you feel (or what do you think) about that? (Her thoughts and feelings matter)
- How did that hit you? (Shows interest in and understand her feelings)
- How do you see it?
- What's your understanding?
- How did/does that make you feel? (Her feelings are important)
- It seems like you're feeling _____. Is that right? Talk to me. (You care how she feels)

That clarify a point she makes

- So, what you're saying is _____. Right? (Clarification. You want to understand)
- When you say _____, what exactly do you mean? (Get clear on what she's saying)
- Did I get that right? (Confirm your understanding of what was said)
- Correct me if I'm wrong. (Make sure you understand her)

Clarifying agreements and disagreements

- Where do we disagree? (Home in on the core of the disagreement)
- Can we agree that _____? (Finding agreement)

Clarifying and coming to agreement on a request, expectation, task or project:

- How do you see that process happening? (Clarifying expectations)
- What does that look like to you? (Clarify and understand what is wanted)
- What do you need to make that happen? (Identifying and clarifying expectations and needs)
(or Here's what I need to make that happen.)
- So just to be clear, what you're asking for is _____. Is that right? (Confirming your understanding of what she wants)
- Here's what would work for me. (What does success look like to you?)
- Would that work for you? (What does success look like to her?)
- If you got that, would you be happy with it? (Finalizing agreement/negotiation)

Words of apology

- I was wrong and I'm sorry
- Please accept my apology
- I can see how that hurt you
- I'm sorry, that was not my intention
- I wasn't paying attention
- I was only thinking about myself

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Setting boundaries

- That's how I see it. (Establishing your viewpoint)
- It's okay. We both have needs. Your needs are important, mine too. (Boundaries)
- I'm asking that you respect my feelings in this. (You have a right to your feelings.)

Expressing your needs

- What would help me would be _____. (Asking for what you want)
- Here's what I need..... (Expressing your needs)
- I hope you can appreciate that. (Asking for understanding and agreement)
- I need help with that. (Asking for help)

Expressing your feelings

- Can I tell you how that makes me feel?
- Would you like my thoughts?

To calm down / slow down the situation – de-escalate

- Acknowledge it - "I get that you're upset." (Acknowledge her pain/feelings)
- I get that it's difficult or unpleasant. (acknowledging)
- I don't want to diminish your feelings. (Softening, acknowledging)
- It's understandable that you're upset. (acknowledging her upset or that we're both upset)
- We're going to figure this out together. (reassure)
- What you think (or how you feel) is important to me. (Acknowledging her. She's important, her feelings are important.)
- We're both upset, let's try to calm down and be more respectful. (de-escalate)
- What do you need from me right now? (Her needs are important)

When she's defensive

- This isn't about right or wrong, let's just try to understand each other.
- This isn't about winning or losing. I don't want to win. We can both win. (De-escalate argument)
- You're not the bad guy here. No one has to be the bad guy.
- Are you feeling attacked? I don't want to do that. (De-escalate)
- What you're saying is really important. (Acknowledge her and her feelings)
- It's okay to feel how you feel. (acceptance)
- Am I coming on too strong?
- You're doing great, keep going. (Encourage her)
- It's not about punishing you. That's the last thing I want to do. (de-escalate)
- I'm on your side.

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To slow things down or get some time to figure things out

- I appreciate your thoughts. I need time to process that.
- I'll need time to think about that.
- I'll need time to get past that.
- Can we get back to this?
- I don't have an answer right now, I'll pray on it and get back to you.

Soften the conversation / Acknowledging her feelings

- You're making a good point. (agreement, acknowledging her thinking)
- That makes perfect sense. (agreement, acknowledge her thoughts and beliefs)
- You have every right to feel that way. (Acknowledge her feelings)
- I get it (or I get what you're saying). (show understanding)
- Coming from your perspective, I can see how you would feel that way. (Validating her feelings)
- It's understandable why you feel that way. (Acknowledging her feelings)
- I hear what you're saying and it's important to me. (you're important to me)

Influence her without being controlling:

We often have an overwhelming urge to fix her or tell her what to do or what she is doing wrong. None of this works. It's okay to present her with a suggestion or another perspective but ask her first and be gentle. Give it to her and then *let it go*. Watch your motivation. Remember it's *not your job* to change her or control her. Avoid the phrase, "You need to" or "You should".

Ask if she wants your thoughts first (sometimes she just wants to feel "heard" and she's not looking for us to solve anything:

- Can I give you another perspective? (non-threatening way, consider your thoughts and feelings)
- Would you like to hear another idea? (influence to the good, problem solving)
- Would you like my thoughts?

Then soften them when you give them:

- Another way to look at it might be _____ .
- You might want to think about ...
- You might want to consider ...
- What do you think about _____?
- Have you ever thought about _____?
- It seems to me that..
- I noticed that...
- I wonder if...
- I was thinking...

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Words that soften anger:

- Not “angry” but “upset”?
- Not “angry” but “unhappy with it”
- Not “yelling” but “raising your voice”.
- Not “pissed” but angry.
- Not “angry”, but “It seems like it isn’t going to work for you.”
- Not “freaked out” but “upset”.
- Not “went ballistic”, but you “got angry”.
- Not “I’m angry”, but “I’m feeling angry”.

Saying No

It’s okay to say no. Maybe preface it with a “honey” or “Sweetheart”.

- Sorry. I can’t help you with that
- I’m not sure about that.
- That doesn’t work for me.
- I’m not at peace with that.
- I’m really uncomfortable with that.
- I changed my mind.
- This is not optional for me right now.
- I can’t do that.
- It doesn’t *seem* appropriate (instead of it’s not appropriate).
- I have to respectfully disagree.
- I don’t see it that way.
- That feels inappropriate to me.
- I can’t give you what you’re looking for right now.
- Can we agree to disagree? Or: Lets just agree that we disagree on this point.

Ending the conversation on a better note:

Be aware. The moment that you sense that the conversation is starting to go south. It’s time to wrap it up. Let her finish talking, then end it with love and grace. Try this:

1. Thank her for the conversation and expressing her feelings:

- Thank you for letting me know your feelings.
- This has been a really good conversation
- Thank you for saying that.
- I’m glad you told me how you feel.
- Thank you so much for this discussion
- Thank you for telling me how you feel.
- Thanks, I’m really glad that we’re talking about this.
- Thanks, what you’re saying is super important to me.

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2. Give a reason for pausing the conversation:

- We're not going to figure this out all at once.
- We don't have to always agree on everything.
- I don't want us to get into an argument.
- I'm getting a little overwhelmed.
- I need some time to process this.
- Let's take a break.
- Let's set this aside for the rest of the day.
- I'm going to need some time to think about what you're saying.

3. Reassure her that you want to continue talking about this:

- I want to keep working on this.
- Let's/Can we pick this up later.
- We're going to figure this out. Let's keep this dialog open.
- I do want to get back to it.
- Do you want to pick this up tomorrow morning?
- I want to hear everything you have to say. Can we continue later?