



How do you start a hard conversation with your partner?

Cut out the card along the dashed line (6 by about 4 inches). Say one line, then stop and listen. Use your own words when they come.

Starting a hard conversation

1. Ask for a time: "Could we find twenty minutes tonight?"
2. Name the topic in one sentence, and what this talk is not about.
3. Say what you feel and what you need before any evidence.
4. Make one clear request, not a hint.
5. If it starts badly: "Hang on, I opened that badly. Let me try again."

All the lines, and when to use them

There's something I've been wanting to talk about, and it's a little awkward for me. Could we find twenty minutes tonight or tomorrow? (Before anything else. Booking the talk gives your partner a chance to show up rested instead of ambushed, and it gives you time to pick your words.)

I want to talk about where we're spending Thanksgiving. I'm not trying to settle it tonight. I just want us to start. (The topic is big and your partner tends to feel cornered by decisions. Shrinking the job of this one conversation lowers the stakes.)

I'm nervous bringing this up because I don't want it to become a fight. I've been feeling lonely in the evenings, and I'd like some time with you that isn't screens. (You are anxious about their reaction. Naming your own nerves out loud often softens the listener, and it keeps the focus on your feeling and your need.)

This isn't about anything you did wrong. It's something I've been turning over for a while: I'm not sure I want to stay in this city past next year. (The hard topic is about your own change of heart, not a complaint. Saying so up front stops them from searching their memory for what they did.)

Can I get the whole thing out first, and then I really want to hear what you think? (You have rehearsed this and you are afraid you will lose your nerve if you get interrupted halfway through.)

I'd like us to stop putting takeout on the joint card until the balance is paid down. Could we try that for two months? (You already know the change you want. A clear, time-limited request is easier to say yes to than a general complaint about spending.)

Hang on, I opened that badly. What I actually mean is that I miss you, not that you're doing something wrong. (Your first sentence came out as blame and you can see their face closing. Restarting quickly costs you nothing and can save the conversation.)

I don't need an answer right now. Will you think about it, and we can come back to it Sunday morning? (The talk has gone fine but nothing is decided. Ending with a specific next time keeps it from turning into either pressure or a dropped subject.)

Phrases to avoid

"We need to talk.": It announces trouble without saying what the trouble is, so your partner spends the wait imagining the worst and arrives defensive.

"Don't get mad, but...": It predicts anger before they have heard anything, and often makes it more likely. Just say the thing calmly.

Opening with the case file: "On Monday you..., and then Wednesday...": A list of dated offenses sounds like a prosecution. Your partner will dispute the details and the actual need never gets heard.

"I'm fine, it's nothing" followed by days of hints: Indirect signals feel safer, but in the research on change attempts they rarely produced change; a clear request did .

If you are afraid of your partner, scripts are not the answer: call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or text START to 88788. In danger, call 911.