

## The Hard Conversation

All couples have moments of needing to engage in difficult conversations with each other. At times, you may find that you feel stuck in a pattern where each of you are talking past each other, neither really hearing nor responding in a way that is useful.

The following exercise is a way to structure one of these hard conversations. It gives you both an opportunity to say what needs to be said, listen openly to the other person, and move forward on the issue.

One person must choose to be the *speaker* and one person must choose to be the *enquirer*.

The *speaker's* role is to give an open and honest account of the problem from their point of view. It is their job to explain the problem in a way that gives their partner the best opportunity to understand it from their perspective. This is best achieved without the use of sarcasm, a raised voice, or by telling the other person what they thought or felt (e.g., "I know you don't care about how I feel but...").

The *enquirer's* role is to listen, explore, and understand the problem from the *speaker's* perspective. The *enquirer* may only do three things: **validate** the other person's experience (e.g., "Wow, that sounds like you were really hurt by that"), **clarify** something the *speaker* said (e.g., "Can I just double check, did you think I was referring to you when I said X?"), and **ask questions** to deepen their understanding of the topic (e.g., "What was going on in your mind when you heard me say X on the phone"). Typically, the *enquirer* will only be speaking approximately 10% of the time compared to the *speaker*. It is **not** the *enquirer's* role to try and fix the problem, to explain how *speaker* is wrong, or to argue for their own point of view.

### Example topics for *speakers*

1. When I come home from work, I sometimes feel overwhelmed when you ask me to speak about my day immediately. I really appreciate that you take such an interest and I have no problem with talking to you, I just need a good hour to decompress.
2. Sometimes I want to have sex with you, but I just get this sense that you don't want to. I know that I then get kind of awkward, sullen, and sometimes a bit snappy at you. I'm typically feeling hurt or rejected and I want to feel desired and loved.

### Example questions for *enquirers*

1. Tell me more about why this is so important to you?
2. What are the background factors which relate to this?
3. What can I specifically do to help here?
4. Is there a deeper issue that this relates to as well?
5. Are there other times when you feel like this too?