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The Soft Startup

Conflict happens in every relationship -- the way you complain can have positive and negative impact. Use Soft Startup techniques to remove some of the anger and accusation from the argument.

1. Voice your complaint but don't blame your partner.

When you want to say this...

Hey, you promised to clean up the backyard today and it's still a mess! The dog's toys are everywhere and I can't see the grass for the leaves.

Try this, instead

Hey, I just let the dog out and noticed lots of leaves and tennis balls. We agreed you'd rake and clean up after him. I'm really upset and I'd like your help with this.

2. Tell your story using "I", not "you".

Using "I" will feel less critical to your partner and will keep them from becoming defensive.

When you want to say this...

You aren't listening to me!

Try this, instead

I'm not feeling heard. Would you listen to me for a minute?

3. Just state the facts.

Describe what's happening, without evaluation or judgment. Then share what you'd like them to do. That way they don't have to be a mind reader!

When you want to say this...

You never watch the baby!

Try this, instead

I'm really exhausted – could you help with Emma today?

4. Be polite and appreciative

You still love and respect your partner. Show that, even as you disagree.

When you want to say this...

Did you pay the electric bill? I don't want to get another late notice.

Try this, instead

I know you've had a long day already, but would you please pay the electric bill before bed?

These four techniques should make it easier to start difficult conversations and make it easier to reach resolution. Now you won't find yourself storing up issues because you don't know how to bring them up.