

Navigating Tense Conversations

With Oren Jay Sofer

My partner and I usually get along great. We work well together as a team, whether it's running errands, keeping the house tidy, or supporting each other emotionally.

We've both been a bit more irritable lately, getting short with each other about little things that ordinarily wouldn't bother us.

"You still haven't done the dishes?"

"Everything is still out—why didn't you put stuff away?"

Stress makes most of us more irritable, and these are definitely stressful times.

Fortunately, we've both developed the skills to navigate these irritations with a lot of ease. We're quick to take responsibility for our own crabbiness if we speak sharply. And, we've got a lot of love and goodwill in the bank, so we're able to forgive each other and move on relatively quickly.

Without the ability to make amends, **little moments of tension can eat away at an otherwise healthy, loving relationship.**

Just the other day, we got into an argument about something silly within five minutes of Evan coming home from a long day of work at the hospital. Fortunately, she had the presence of mind to pause, smile, and say, "Hey, can we start over?"

Slightly embarrassed, we both laughed a little, shared a knowing look, and had a light-hearted do-over. "Welcome home, honey! How was your day?"

Taking responsibility for a misstep and inviting a do-over is a simple yet powerful way to build trust in close relationships. Here are a few other tips for tense moments:

- Get to know your habitual responses so you can recognize them more quickly
- Give yourself a moment to pause and regroup
- Try guessing what matters to the other person so they can feel heard
- Before speaking, check if you're in the right frame of mind for the conversation
- Take time to appreciate the good things about each other