

# CAN WE TALK?

## HANDLING CONFLICT GRACEFULLY



**When it comes to conflict, girls are caught between two tough choices. On the one hand, we want to keep our relationships peaceful. On the other hand, when we stay quiet, feelings of resentment, anger and frustration multiply.**

Sometimes, the feelings get so intense that they ruin the relationship quietly, without the other person even knowing. Or we lose control and say or do something we regret.

The number one fear girls have about direct conflict is that it will end their relationships, or damage them permanently. Yet the reality is that not speaking up when you're upset may do that anyway. There's no way to know for sure what's going to happen when you speak your brave truth -- until you try.

We've got a roadmap for you to follow that can help you deliver difficult news with class.

### **SAMPLE CONFLICT: THE DISAPPEARING FRIEND**

**Your close friend has started acting distant since she got involved with a new project that takes up most of her free time. You're happy for her, so you haven't said anything about how you feel. Yesterday, though, your friend didn't reply to two of your texts and one Instagram comment, so you stood her up for lunch at your usual spot and waited an hour to reply to her texts asking where you were.**

#### **AFFIRM THE RELATIONSHIP.**

Say something positive about your relationship, so you can send the message that you want a future beyond the conversation ("I like working with you," "I care about you a lot.")

Before you continue, say, "and." Do NOT say "but." When you say, "I care about you, but" it sounds like: I care about you but really I maybe don't care about you.

**EXAMPLE:** Our friendship is so important to me, and...

#### **EXPLAIN THE PROBLEM.**

Use an "I Statement" that describes your feelings and the specific actions of the other person. Be as detailed as you can: explain the day, time and place it happened. It should sound something like this: "I felt [emotion] when you [specific action]."

**EXAMPLE:** I felt hurt when you didn't reply to my texts yesterday.



Avoid using a "You Statement," an accusation that often starts with the word "you." Example: "You keep things from me all the time." This always puts people on the defensive.

Avoid criticizing the other person's character ("I felt hurt when you were rude to me..." or "I felt angry when you were obnoxious..."). This makes people feel like they have to defend who they are, instead of what they did. Focus on their behavior ("I felt hurt when you didn't ask me about my job interview").

Finally, avoid using the words "always" or "never" ("You always cancel our plans to hang out with your new friends.") Most people stop listening when you use these words and immediately try and think of a time they did or didn't do what you're accusing them of.

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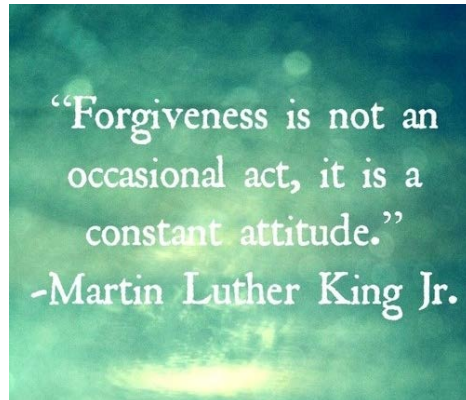
### SHARE YOUR CONTRIBUTION.

Being brave means being the bigger person. Admit what you might have done to make the conflict bigger. Did you wait until you were really mad to tell the other person about your feelings? Did you send a snippy text? This isn't about taking all the blame; it's about showing you're mature enough to know that real conflicts involve two people. Owning up to your part in the conflict is a powerful way to show the other person how motivated you are to resolve it. It can lead to an apology from the other person, too.

**EXAMPLE:** I realize I should have told you how I was feeling earlier – and I'm sorry I stood you up at lunch.

### SUGGEST HOW YOU CAN SOLVE IT TOGETHER.

It took two of you to get here, so it will take both of you to move on. Share one thing you can do to prevent the problem from happening again. Then, think of something the other person could do on her side.



**EXAMPLE:** I will be more direct with my feelings from now on – and I won't stand you up for lunch again. Can you please be more responsive to me when I text – and can we make a plan to hang out next week?

### BRAVE TIPS:

Use your contribution to help you along: if you didn't tell someone how you felt and that made the conflict worse, your solution can be to share your feelings more directly next time.

Be VERY specific about what you need from the other person. When you go into a restaurant, you don't just say, "I'm hungry." You request exactly what you want. The same is true in a conflict: you have to be precise. If you need someone to tell you if they're going to be late to meet you, don't just ask them to be on time. Ask them to text you if they will be more than five minutes late.

### GRACE NOTES

There are no guarantees in a conversation. You can only control your own behavior, not the other person's.

Watch your tone of voice and body language; that can count just as much as what you say! Refusing to look at someone, making loud sighing noises, rolling your eyes and crossing your arms all send the message that you're annoyed, don't really care, or want to fight. Instead, make eye contact, keep your hands at your sides, and speak at a decibel level you'd be comfortable using in a religious building, like a church, mosque or synagogue.

These four steps aren't for digital conversations. If you have to, write a letter.

There are certain situations when you won't have a contribution – like if someone just tries to fight with you out of nowhere, and there is absolutely nothing you did to provoke it.

**THERE'S NO WAY TO KNOW FOR SURE WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN YOU SPEAK YOUR BRAVE TRUTH – UNTIL YOU TRY.**

