

THE RELATIONSHIP BLUEPRINT

The Fair Fight Cheat Sheet



The words to use when the conversation matters most
— so you get honesty instead of defensiveness.

A free guide · Print it, save it, use it before you speak

Before you say a word

Most difficult conversations are lost in the first thirty seconds — before anyone has said anything true.

When you raise something painful, your partner's body decides whether it's under attack long before their mind decides whether you're right. If they feel accused, they defend. Once they're defending, they stop listening — and everything true you say afterwards lands on a closed door.

A fair fight isn't a softer fight. It's a fight where the real thing actually gets said, and heard. These four steps are how you get there.

1 Pick the moment, not the impulse

Never open this conversation when either of you is tired, drinking, driving, or already upset. Say: *"There's something on my mind. Is now okay, or is later better?"* Asking permission lowers their guard before you've said anything hard.

2 Name one thing, not everything

Bring a single, specific situation. Not a history. The moment you say "you always" or "every time", you've handed them something to argue about — and they'll argue about that instead of the thing that hurt.

3 Lead with the feeling, not the verdict

"I felt lonely" is something they cannot dispute. "You ignored me" is a charge they can — and will. Your feeling is yours. Your conclusion about their motive is a guess, and guesses start fights.

4 Ask for one thing you can picture

End with something specific enough to actually do. "I'd like us to have one evening a week with phones in another room" beats "I want you to care more". Vague requests can't be met, so they become the next argument.

The thirty-second rule

Say your opening in under thirty seconds, then stop and let them speak. Long openings feel like a case being built against them — and people defend themselves against cases.

Say this, not that

Same meaning. Completely different response. Keep this page open on your phone if you need to.

THIS CLOSES THEM DOWN

"You never make time for me."

"Why are you being so defensive?"

"You clearly don't care."

"We need to talk."

"You always do this."

"Fine. Forget it."

"So it's my fault now?"

THIS KEEPS THEM OPEN

"I've been missing you this week."

"I think I said that badly. Let me try again."

"I can't tell what you're feeling right now, and it's worrying me."

"Something's been sitting with me. Can we find twenty minutes?"

"When it happened on Tuesday, here's what it did to me."

"I'm too wound up to do this well. Can we come back to it at eight?"

"I want to understand your side before I explain mine."

When it starts going wrong

You'll know: voices rise, the same sentence repeats, someone brings up something from two years ago. That's not a signal to push harder — it's a signal that neither of you is learning anything.

Use the pause, and be the one who offers it: *"I care about this too much to do it badly. Twenty minutes, then we come back."* Then actually come back. A pause you don't return from is just a walkout with better manners.

How to repair afterwards

Repair is not the same as winning. It's three sentences: name your part without a "but", say what you'll do differently, then ask what they needed and didn't get. *"I raised my voice, and that wasn't fair. Next time I'll ask for the pause sooner. What did you need from me tonight?"*

Why the same fight keeps coming back

If you've read this and thought "I know all of this, and I still can't do it in the moment" — that's the real answer.

Under pressure, nobody chooses their words. You reach for whatever kept you safe as a child: chasing when someone goes quiet, going quiet yourself, keeping the peace at any cost, or getting there first with anger.

That reflex has a name and a shape, and once you can see yours, these scripts stop feeling like lines you're reciting and start feeling like something you can actually reach for when your heart is pounding.

This is your own work, and it's the part that changes things — because it's the only side of the fight you fully control.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Find out which pattern is running your fights

Take the free attachment style quiz — around four minutes, twenty-four questions. You'll get your pattern, what triggers it, and which of these scripts will work best for you.

Take the free quiz →

relationshipsblueprint.com/quiz

An important note

This guide is for conversations that are painful, not for relationships that are unsafe. If you feel frightened of your partner, if you change your behaviour to avoid their reaction, or if you are being controlled, threatened, or hurt, these scripts are not the right tool — and none of it is your fault to fix with better wording.

Free, confidential helplines in your country are listed at findahelpline.com.

To speak to someone: search the directory at psychologytoday.com, or find lower-cost sessions through openpathcollective.org.

The Relationship Blueprint shares educational content about relationship psychology. It is not therapy and is not a substitute for professional support.