Eight Ways To Improve Your Relationship
Power & Compassion Communication Skills & Agreements

This is a summary of my communication skills course to help couples stop arguing and start understanding each other. Implementing these agreements and skills will give you concrete measurable evidence your relationship is changing... or not. Knowing when to quit may simply mean that you decide to stop hoping for specific changes and accept yourself, your partner, and your relationship as is. Or not. What I can assure you is that the five agreements and the two skills are simple and concrete. It’s a simple program. Additional training and materials usually clears up the usual misunderstandings that couples have.

Real Hope For Couples Conflict

Is there Real Hope for change in your relationship? The course offers 7 ways to find out!

These are five foundations of respect within a relationship:

- I’ll listen to you until you feel done when you ask; and I’ll expect the same from you.
- I’ll spend 20 minutes a week with you to listen to whatever you need me to understand.
- I’ll let you leave the room, if you feel flooded, trusting you’ll return to talk within an hour.
- I’ll let you define if you feel disrespected by my tone of voice, and I’ll stop when you ask.
- And I’ll get seek some help if I can’t reasonably follow my agreements with you.

Marc has conducted over 100 monthly couples communication weekend workshops in Los Angeles, and has helped thousands of couples find a way to walk through conflict realistically and respectfully. Even those couples with one or both partners considering an ending have a last best effort chance to see if their relationship can change for the better. The course has 5 agreements and 2 skills that are simple, direct, and behaviorally measured.

People act aggressively or withdraw because they don’t know what else to do.

Know exactly what else can be done or said in those critical moments.

When you know better you do better!
## Eight Ways To Make Your Relationship Thrive

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<td>1</td>
<td>Listening without interrupting, postpone defending myself and to reflect what I’ve heard. Take turns speaking and listening. Respect the rules of the Listening Exchange.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Diminish or cease blaming, criticizing and withdrawal behaviors. Use the Respect Agreement.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Learn to express vulnerable thoughts and feelings that are underneath harsh and critical ones. To speak in ‘I think’ or ‘I feel’ messages.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Being responsible for what I say or do and to acknowledge how that affects my partner. If I’ve been hurtful, then I make amends and try to be mindful of my mistake.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Asking directly for understanding of my experience and to make specific requests for changes.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Make a mutually binding agreement on <strong>HOW</strong> to leave the room for less than an hour, when arguing escalates with too much emotional intensity. And, have a method for how both partners reconnect by taking some responsibility for the problem and showing some empathy for the other partner’s experience.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Agreeing on a method of how to deal with moments when either partner feels hurt, dismissed, or disrespected.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Having a plan on what I will do if I cannot reasonably keep my agreements.</td>
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### Common Questions

- What if there is addiction, abuse, or violence?
- What if one partner doesn’t want to change?
- What if there is mental illness or lying?
- What if one partner never thinks he or she ever does anything wrong?

The Power And Compassion course *provides a structure* to move through problems like these. There is an agreement or skill directly related to each of the eight points made above. You can use the skills and agreements to express your concerns about any of the above questions to move the relationship along so you will have a better idea about what you want to do. Learn respectful ways to say, and to hear, and to dialogue about difficult emotions. Model for your partner how you would like your partner to respond and express painful thoughts and feelings.
Handling Conflict With Confidence & Real Hope For Relationships

When you know better you do better.
– Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou’s quote, “When you know better you do better.” is a good way of summing up why I think the Power & Compassion Course can be helpful for couples, families and workplaces. Making and keeping the five agreements assures that there is a structure that both partners know and have agreed upon to handle tough moments of arguing. When both partners know there is another way of handling these moments, but one partner cannot adhere to his or her commitment, then that person is ‘out of his or her control.’ If one partner is out of control there is an agreement that covers that possibility with concrete actions.

What distinguishes this course is the laser focus on behaviors, agreements, and skills that are needed for navigating conflict. It is designed with simplicity in mind. An important understanding for couples to accept is the hopelessness, futility and danger of continuing to talk or argue when either partner is feeling threatened and is under the influence… of adrenaline, that is. Knowing this truth is not enough. Some people know better, for instance, than to argue with someone who has been drinking a lot. Many still do not heed their better judgment continuing to get someone to understand something, when they are in a state that doesn’t allow understanding.

Lack of knowledge is not always the couples’ core dilemma. People involved in high conflict know that yelling, emotional defending, or withdrawing can be destructive to their relationships. Those wanting to eliminate unnecessary arguing, often simply lack the power to cease talking, to cease trying to be heard in that moment, or to have the last word, or to cease the effort to make the other stop, or to make the other understand now. There is a mutual agreement to separate, for up to an hour, and then return with statements indicating awareness of ‘what part I played in this problem, how that affected my partner and what I’ll do about it’. Both partners can develop responsibility, empathy for the other and to demonstrate efforts to improve.

The three behaviors which indicate that a partner is ‘out of control,’ are:

1) Frequently interrupting while being a ‘listener’ in the Listening Exchange.
2) Not allowing the partner to leave the room when a Time Out is called.
3) One, or both partners, continue to use intimidation, hostility or withdrawal.
The qualities needing improvement for couples in high conflict are very concrete and basic:

- To stop defending yourself immediately anytime a partner is upset with you.
- To cease interrupting your partner, changing the subject of what s/he brought up.
- To cease blaming and learn to express vulnerable feelings, such as fear, shame, or guilt.
- To stop the negative mind reading of your partner’s intentions.
- To stop hurting your partner when you feel hurt or threatened.
- To accept responsibility for your part in the problem. And, to make amends.
- To respect a partner’s desire to take a time out on a conversation and briefly separate.
- To seek help when it’s clear you cannot keep your agreements.

All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten, written by Robert Fulghum, summarizes many qualities of character building and skills of getting along with others:

- Don’t be selfish. Give up what you want sometimes.
- Clean up your own mess.
- Take turns. Be polite. Follow the rules. Don’t make up your own rules.
- Be responsible and honest.
- Say what you mean. Do what you say.
- Ask for what you want. Say please, thank you and I’m sorry.
- Be considerate, play fair, and share your toys.
- Don’t believe everything you think.

We all grew up with these basic rules of behavior. The problem is that when we feel criticized, rejected, or threatened, adrenaline begins rushing through the nervous system. This is the ‘fight or flight’ hormone that gives us energy quickly when we need it to survive. Under the influence of adrenaline we become less capable of rational thought. We forget the basic rules of relationship.

I saw a special on a cable channel about the training of Secret Service agents who protect the President. The director of training said that if he shot a gun at the ceiling in a room full of people; that every single person would be moving away from the sound of the shot. He saw one of his more difficult tasks as re-training his agents to move toward the sound of the gun so the agent could quickly disarm the assassin to protect the president. This moving toward the danger is not a natural reflex to train in people.
All the couples I’ve seen have a similarly difficult task. It was a difficult task for me, in my own life. When a person feels attacked by one’s partner the most natural human response is to defend oneself. This is done by explaining, defending, withdrawing emotionally, or attacking back. Getting rid of the defensive reflex is a very unnatural reflex to develop. After completing the exercises in this book you will find that when someone you care about is angry with you, you can move toward the anger, responding to your partner’s concerns first, before defending yourself. Having done that, you have earned the right to express and explain what your experience of the problem is. The core problem of most couples arguing is that both partners are often trying to explain and express their side at the same time. With both partners trying to express their experience at the same time, the result is that no one is heard. No one is satisfied; and both partners feel more disturbed with the other.

The natural instinct is to defend when attacked. This Course will train you to positively respond in a way that shows that you are accountable for your behavior and, that you care about how your partner was affected by what you did. This means that when you hear your partner’s angry or offended tone of voice, you first move toward the anger in a way that shows you know you said or did something, that affected your partner badly and that you want to do something about that.

These are the same organizing principles of what couples learn in the Power & Compassion program. All of the principles above are manifested in the five agreements and two skills, which you and your partner are beginning today!

Using these agreements and skills will transform your relationship and help to develop your character!

The Power & Compassion Course will, either improve your relationship conflict skills and you will grow as a couple, or you will have the information you need to determine that it is a toxic hope to continue believing that the relationship will change. Either of these outcomes is a good thing! You can stay and learn acceptance and gratitude. Or, you may have the information you need to decide to change the commitment to your relationship.

Some couples will just make this agreement and will not need any further help. Most people need more education, examples, and training in using them.
The first agreement is a concrete, specific map that spells out how either partner can leave a room when agitated. One of the two skills learned in the course then spells out exactly what to say when the partners reconnect after that Time Out. The first words spoken to each other, upon reconnection, are crucial. Those first words after a conflict indicate whether there is a desire for reconnection, or a desire for more conflict. The lessons and exercises for learning exactly what to say are included in the seminar and book.

Some people will simply read about these skills, begin to use them, and their relationships will improve. Most people need a little more information, help, and training to fully understand the concepts and to want to stick to the guidelines. The first 3-hour workshop on ‘Real Power In Relationships’ spends at least 40 minutes on training in video and fun role-play simulations. This results in each person absolutely memorizing the three steps to responding to use, before explaining or defending their point of view.

Think of the number of hours of tense or distant evenings you’ve spent being angry with your partner. The time you put into a workshop will be more than made up for by the future pleasant moments and evenings together!

You insure your car, your, house and even your life. Insure that your relationship thrives to its highest possibility?

See what others say about their workshop experience here.

Real Hope For Couples Conflict
The course shows 7 ways to find out if there is Real Hope for change in your relationship.

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