

DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

PHRASE BANK · 12 MOVES

Sourced from the Difficult Conversations Playbook

01 OPEN WITH RELATIONAL FRAME

"I want us to leave this feeling closer, not further apart."

Names destination before topic. Pre-empts threat.

03 REFLECT INTEREST BACK

"You're saying X because what matters to you is Y. Right?"

Validates, surfaces interest, cools both amygdalas.

05 GENTLE STARTUP

"I felt [X] when [specific behavior]. I'd like [request]."

Behavior, not character. The criticism antidote.

07 TAKE YOUR 10%

"You're right that I [specific thing]. I should have flagged it."

Find the part that's yours. Defensiveness collapses.

09 REPAIR — SPECIFIC ACT

"I raised my voice. I shut you down. That landed badly."

Name what you did, not what they felt.

11 REPAIR — ACTION

"Next time I feel that coming, I'll name it and ask for ten."

Behavioral change, not promise to be better.

02 NAME YOUR ACTIVATION

"I notice I'm getting reactive. Can we pause for a minute?"

Discharges the hijack in both nervous systems.

04 SHARED SUBSTRATE

"What do we both want, underneath this?"

Collapses the adversarial frame.

06 APPRECIATION PRIMER

"I know how much you've been carrying. I want to talk about something heavy."

Oxytocin before threat. The contempt antidote.

08 TIME-OUT WITH RETURN

"I need twenty minutes. I'll come back at 7."

Stonewalling antidote. The return time matters.

10 REPAIR — IMPACT

"That felt like contempt, which is the last thing I want from me."

Name cost to them, not your intent.

12 WALK AWAY WITH CARE

"I love you and this isn't working. I want different than this for both of us."

Care, not contempt. End conversations well.