



SOFT STARTUP



YOUR SECRET WEAPON IN CONFLICT DISCUSSIONS

A soft startup is a communication technique where a person begins a conversation, especially a potentially contentious one, with gentleness, positivity, and without blame. The way a conversation begins predicts how it will end. Starting softly can prevent defensiveness and escalation, setting the stage for a constructive dialogue.

STATISTICS AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Gottman Institute

According to their research, 96% of the time, the outcome of a conversation can be predicted based on the first three minutes.

Conflict Outcomes

Couples who start discussions gently are more likely to resolve conflicts effectively and maintain relationship satisfaction.

USING SOFT STARTUPS EFFECTIVELY



Call for a Soft Startup

- Use phrases like “Can we do a soft startup?” or “Let’s try a soft startup.”
- Practice soft startups even when there’s no conflict to get comfortable with the technique.



Restart After Conflict Begins

- If the conversation starts off poorly, use a soft startup to reset.
- Example: “I think we need a soft startup to refocus on the positives before we continue.”



Multiple Times in One Conversation

- It’s okay to use soft startups several times in the same discussion.
- Repetition can help maintain a positive and constructive atmosphere.



Focus Solely on Positives

- During a soft startup, focus only on positive aspects, not on the conflict itself.
- This can include happy memories, things you admire about your partner, or positive experiences together.



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PRACTICAL EXAMPLES AND SCENARIOS

Example 1: Managing Household Chores

- Harsh Startup: "You never help around the house. I'm always stuck doing everything!"
- Soft Startup: "I've been feeling a bit overwhelmed lately. I know you're dealing with a lot too, but I feel stressed when the house gets messy. I want to talk about how we can share more of the household responsibilities. I would like us to do a soft start up and then have a conversation to see if we can find a way to keep things tidier."

Example 2: Financial Concerns

- Harsh Startup: "You're always spending too much money. We can't afford this!"
- Soft Startup: "I know we both want to enjoy our earnings. I've been feeling anxious about our budget. I want us to take some time to discuss how we can manage our expenses, but I feel nervous about the conversation. Can we do a soft start up first?"

Example 3: Quality Time Together

- Harsh Startup: "You never spend time with me. You're always busy with something else!"
- Soft Startup: "I love the moments we spend together. Lately, I've been missing that time. Let's do a soft start up and then see if we can plan some activities we can enjoy together."



Reflection Questions

1. Think of a recent conflict. How did it start?
Was it a harsh or soft startup?
2. How do you usually feel when a conversation starts with blame or criticism? How might a soft startup change your response?
3. What are some ways you can incorporate positive statements into your conversations?



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CHEAT SHEET



Happy Memories

- "I remember our vacation to the beach. It was such a wonderful time together."
- "Do you remember how we met? That was such a special day."



Acknowledging the Softening:

- "I really admire your dedication to your work."
- "I appreciate how you always make time for our family."



Looking Forward

- "I'm looking forward to our date night this weekend."
- "I can't wait for our upcoming trip. It's going to be so much fun."



Achievements and Gratitude

- "I'm so proud of everything we've achieved together."
- "I'm grateful for your support in my career."



Reassurance and Positive Intention

- "I want you to know that I always have your back."
- "I love you, and I'm committed to working through this together."

REASSURANCE: THE POWER OF PRACTICE

Feeling Forced is Normal

It's natural to feel awkward or contrived when first using a soft startup. However, practice helps it become more natural and effective. The initial effort to change your approach can significantly improve the quality of your interactions.

Shifting State of Mind and Body

Even if a soft startup feels forced, it can still shift your state of mind and body, promoting a calmer and more constructive dialogue. By calming the nervous system, a soft startup increases the odds of a less damaging conflict and fosters a more positive interaction.