GENESIS CLINICAL SERVICES

How to Disagree Without Being Disagreeable

A couple's guide to respectful conversations

Make room for different views while protecting respect and connection.
Aim to understand each other and work towards repair.

1 Clarify the issue

Is this a difference, a misunderstanding or an assumption? Choose one specific concern. Check that you are both ready to talk and agree on what you hope to resolve.

2 Agree on boundaries

No insults, threats, intimidation or physical aggression. Let each other finish. Stay with the issue and avoid keeping score or bringing in unrelated grievances.

3 Listen with curiosity

Reflect back what you heard and ask for clarification. Consider the strongest, fairest version of their view. Ask: "Have I understood you correctly?"

4 Speak with care

Begin with something you agree on, then name your concern. Try: "I feel hurt when plans change without a conversation. I would like us to check in first."

5 Notice what is stirred up

Pause and breathe before responding. Ask yourself whether an older hurt is shaping this moment. Choose what needs attention and what you can let go.

6 Pause and return

If either person feels overwhelmed, take a break and agree when to return. You do not have to resolve everything before bedtime. Return when you can listen.

7 Take responsibility

Acknowledge your part without adding "but you..." Offer a specific apology when needed. Ask what would help repair the hurt and rebuild trust.

8 Choose a next step

Find a shared goal and agree on one realistic action. Follow through on your commitments. Afterwards, reflect together on what helped and what you can practise.

Try the switch sides exercise

1 Write four points that support the other person's perspective.
2 Summarize their view in words they would recognize as fair.
3 Ask yourself: "What might I have overlooked?"

Support for the conversations that matter

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In-person in Toronto | Virtual across Ontario

Book a free 15-minute consultation at genesisclinicalservice.com