



## Speaking Up May Be Hard, But the Rewards Make It Worth It

**S**peaking up, saying the hard thing, can be one of the most difficult things we ever do. For many of us, just thinking about speaking up can cause worry, fear and stress. The good news is that getting these conversations right has more to do with planning and practice than saying “just the right thing.” And when we dare to broach hard topics with other people, there are often hidden rewards.

### The Benefits of Having Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations have the power to get you what you really want from life. They can clear the air between you and someone else. And they can give your self-esteem a real boost.

Revealing how you really feel and what you really want is a life-long practice that sets you up for more good things to come. Regardless of what happens or how the other person responds, making your true self visible will only make you stronger, healthier and more at peace with yourself.

### Setting the Stage for a Productive Conversation

#### 1. YOU bring it up.

It's wishful thinking to hope that the other person will broach a hard topic. In some cases, he or she may not even be aware of the need. That means, like it or not, it's up to you.

#### 2. Be clear on your intention.

Are you discussing a sensitive topic to make a decision, reveal what you've already decided, make

a request, or something else? Being clear about why you are having the conversation—and what you hope to get out of it—will help you frame what you're about to say.

#### 3. Pay attention to your mindset.

Sidestep the tendency to blame and assume you know exactly what is going on. Leave room in your frame of mind for discovery and revelation. Stay curious. Remember how much you care for the person, and envision how you'd like your relationship to be after the conversation.

#### 4. Rehearse.

It can be helpful to practice your conversation by writing in a journal or talking it through with a trusted friend or therapist. This will help you become more familiar with your feelings and point of view, and help you relax before you say the hard thing.

#### 5. Use “I” messages.

“You” statements tend to assign blame. For example, rather than saying, “You hurt my feelings,” it is better to use an “I” message and say, “I feel hurt.” If you're afraid, say what you're afraid of at the beginning of the conversation. For instance, “I'm scared that you won't like me anymore or that you'll go away or that we won't be friends anymore after this conversation.” Then take a deep breath and begin.

Saying the hard thing is like any other exercise: every time you do it, you're building muscle...and your hard work will unquestionably pay off in more meaningful relationships in the end. \*

## 10 Ways to Get Control Over Your Anger

*Uncontrolled anger can damage relationships, careers, even lives. Here are 10 simple ways to check your anger before it spirals out of control.*

- 1. Count to 10.** It sounds simplistic, but it's an easy and quick way to take the edge off of volatile anger.
- 2. Take several deep breaths.** Breathe in calmness and then release anger as you breathe out.
- 3. Take a break.** Before you blow up, walk away from the situation to regroup and gather your thoughts.
- 4. Do something physical.** Take a walk, go to the gym or walk some stairs. Not only is exercise healthy for your body, it'll do wonders for your mood.
- 5. Meditate or listen to some soothing music.** Rewiring your thought patterns toward something peaceful and relaxing can help defuse anger.
- 6. Be grateful.** Learn to find the lesson in every situation and be thankful for opportunities to grow as a person.
- 7. Write it out.** Journaling your thoughts helps you vent in a safe and positive way.
- 8. Refocus the negative energy** of anger into something more positive. Look for humor in the situation.
- 9. Learn to be assertive.** Learn what your needs are and how to make them clear to others in a way that is respectful of yourself and others, not pushy or demanding.
- 10. Seek professional help.** If you find you're angry a lot, recognize when anger might actually be a cry for help. \*

# A Letter From Fred Chapin



Even the thought of bringing up a conversation that we know will be difficult can send many of us into a panic. However, as the cover article explores, the benefits of clearing the air with another person, speaking up and potentially getting what we want, make broaching that difficult conversation worth the risk.

Just as with NOT having those difficult conversations, comparing ourselves or our loved ones to others can have a detrimental impact on our relationships. In addition, comparison often undermines our self-confidence and our children's self-esteem. Breaking the habit of comparison, as the article on page 4 suggests, is well worth the effort.

Nothing gives us more happiness, usually, than the birth of a child. Page 3 offers tips on how to keep your partnership alive and happy after the kids arrive.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how well you take care of yourself during challenging times. And be sure to check the Top 10 for ways to reduce anger, a big stress producer.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

## When Times Are Tough, How Well Do You Support Yourself?

Whether it's a health crisis, the end of a relationship, job loss, financial difficulties or the death of a loved one—we all go through challenging times at various points in life. To cope with such difficulties, self-care is vital but, too often, we are hard on ourselves instead. Answer these true/false questions to discover how well you support yourself during tough times.



### True False

#### Set 1

- 1. During tough times, I get caught up in “putting out fires,” and self-care goes out the window.
- 2. Although it doesn't really help, when I'm facing something difficult, I often self-soothe by over-indulging in food and alcohol.
- 3. It's easy for me to mentally spin out of control with worry and worst-case scenario thinking.
- 4. I can't face my friends and family when things aren't going well; I tend to isolate.
- 5. Shame and blame take over when I'm facing a difficult situation; I either feel it's my fault or someone else's.
- 6. During hard times, I get scared and feel immobilized and depressed.
- 7. I can't understand why bad things happen to good people; it's not fair.
- 8. In the midst of bad times, I lose perspective and have a hard time trusting that things will get better.

#### Set 2

- 1. Caring for myself includes asking for and receiving support from people who love and care about me.
- 2. No matter what's going on, I'm committed to staying on track with my self-care routines.
- 3. I share my feelings and what's going on with people I trust.
- 4. I have tools to help keep myself positively focused.
- 5. No matter how intense the situation, I take the time to do things that make me feel better, such as working out, getting a massage, spending time in nature.
- 6. I surround myself with supportive people and uplifting materials.
- 7. When times are tough, I look for any deeper or broader meaning behind the outer circumstances. That helps me keep the situation in perspective and even use it for my own psychological growth.
- 8. I trust myself to be able to handle whatever comes my way.

If you answered true more often in Set 1 and false more often in Set 2, you may wish to get more support around caring for yourself. Please call if you'd like assistance in exploring this further. \*

## Navigating Your Relationship Now that You Have Children

**Y**ou can read every parenting book and take every class—and yet *no one* can be fully prepared for all the changes that come with adding children into the mix. Your relationship will be tested as you figure out what “normal” means now. At the same time, it can seem impossible to invest attention and energy into your marriage. But with just a bit of effort, the two of you can figure things out and become even closer.

### Start by Easing Up on Expectations

The reality of not enough sleep can leave you feeling that you will snap if even one more thing has to be done! Before the baby (or two or three), things like having a tidy house or baking cookies for a social event may have been something you took for granted. Give yourself permission to say “No” to those things. Be kind to yourself.

It isn’t only the expectations you put on yourself that you need to consider. Your spouse is going through as much change as you are, as you each try to figure out what it means to be a parent. Common areas of conflict include:

- Household chores—“Where did all the laundry come from?”
- Parenting styles—“But my mother always said...”
- Caring for the baby—“It’s your turn to get up.”
- Getting time away—“If I don’t get out of this house...”
- Feeling neglected—“The baby gets all your attention.”



When there are disagreements and unmet expectations, talk them through. It’s time for the two of you to define how your family will work and how the chores will be divided.

### Even the Smallest Actions Can Help You Stay Close

Do all that you can to make each other feel special and appreciated. It can help to think back to what you did when you were first falling in love. Things like little love notes, simple gifts like a flower from the garden, sincere appreciation for completing household chores, or just snuggling can help both of you stay close and connected.

Even the smallest expressions of love can help you

remember all the things about each other that you cherish and appreciate.

**Commit to time for the two of you.** Try to spend at least 15 minutes each day doing something together. It is easiest to find time when your little one is asleep. Turn off the television and pay attention to each other. Share a song, a shower, a funny story, hold hands, cuddle, talk a bit about what is going on or do any other activity that helps you feel closer to one another.



**Take time off.** Parenting is just like any job: people need time off to avoid burn out. This can be anything from one parent caring for the children while the other takes a soak in the tub to a guy’s or girl’s night out with friends. By taking turns, you can both get some quality breaks while knowing that your little ones are in good hands. This will allow you to return to the work of parenting feeling refreshed.

**Plan for a regular date night.** It is important to have some grown-up time without the kids. This is when having a good support system is important. Quality childcare can be provided by family members, by trading off with other couples, or by people you know and trust in your community. Then enjoy your free time, feeling confident that your children are in good hands.

**Treat your time together as special.** Take an extra few minutes with your appearance, set aside any worries and simply have fun. Laughing together can be especially beneficial if you’ve been feeling pretty serious lately. Even an old standby like dinner and a movie can be special. Most importantly—don’t let the kids and domestic issues be the only things you talk about.

It may seem like a lot of work, but investing effort in your relationship will reinforce your foundation and allow you to keep working together as loving partners and parents. \*

# How to Reduce Comparisons and Increase Happiness

Noticing similarities and differences is one way we learn to navigate our world. It's natural.

But trouble comes when we notice differences and then use that information to feel "less than." For instance, rather than noticing someone's success and letting that inspire us to take the risk we've been wanting to take, instead we may despair, believing that we could never have that kind of success ourselves.

So while comparison doesn't have to be a destructive practice, much of the time it is, leading to tumbling self-confidence and harming our ability to be happy in the world. And when we compare our children to others we also run the risk of damaging our relationship with our children as well as their self-esteem.

Here are some tips to help you stop comparing yourself and your loved ones to others:

**Be mindful.** Pay attention to those moments when you are feeling jealously or envy or a sense of inferiority. Awareness of making the comparison is the important first step.

**Put yourself in the other person's shoes.** Nobody's life is perfect. The next time you find yourself agonizing

over someone else's good luck, try to adopt a more realistic view of that person's life. Remember that everyone has struggles *and* moments of happiness.

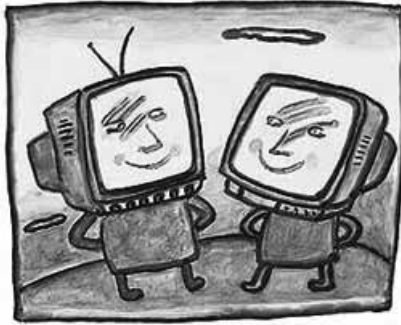
**Cultivate gratitude for what you have.** Look around and notice the aspects of your life that make you happy. Make a daily list of the blessings in your life.

**Focus on your strengths instead of weaknesses.** Rather than thinking, "I'm fat and she's skinny," celebrate your strengths. Be proud of your uniqueness, special talents and skills.

**Give to others what you most desire for yourself.** If you want love, give love. If you want attention, give attention. Helping others is one of the best ways to build your own self-esteem and escape from destructive mental traps.

**Redirect, build up and affirm.** When you find yourself engaging in harmful comparisons, redirect your thoughts to your positive traits or to the wonderful traits of your loved ones, and then compliment yourself or them. Complimenting children not only builds up their self-esteem, but it helps prevent them from adopting the habit of comparing themselves to others.

With practice, it's possible to cultivate a life that is relatively free of comparison—one in which you and your loved ones are much happier. \*



## Chapin & Russell Associates

A Division of Resource Management Services, Inc.

3020 W. Willow Knolls Drive

Peoria, IL 61614

Tel: 309.681.5850 Fax: 309.681.5658

[www.chapinandrussell.com](http://www.chapinandrussell.com)