

**5 Real  
Conversations  
That Change  
Everything**

# GIVING CRITICAL FEEDBACK TO SOMEONE DEFENSIVE

## ● **SCENARIO**

You're trying to give a team member constructive feedback on their work, but they immediately tense up, cross their arms, and their face flushes. You can see they're shutting down.

## ● **THE OLD WAY (WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAY)**

"Look, I'm just trying to help you here. If you can't take feedback without getting defensive, we're going to have a problem. This is part of the job. You need to hear this."

OR (the overly cautious version): "Never mind, it's not that important. We can talk about it another time." [Then harbor resentment]

## ● **THE LOVING ASSERTIVENESS WAY:**

"When I tried to share this insight I think may be helpful, I observed you seemed tense and looked angry."

Do you feel frustrated and wonder if I don't value you? And I'm sure you understandably have a need to be respected and appreciated. No issue there, you are.

Could I ask you to receive this as a 'request for the future' for us to evaluate and commit to, rather than a 'read-out' or a 'diagnosis' which it isn't?

And I'm going to ask you to please just share what you receive okay, so we can be sure. How would that be for you?"

# GIVING CRITICAL FEEDBACK TO SOMEONE DEFENSIVE

## ● WHY IT WORKS

You're addressing the emotional reality in the room instead of pretending it doesn't exist or bulldozing through it.

By naming their probable feeling (frustrated) and underlying need (to be valued), you demonstrate you SEE them as a full person, not just a performance problem.

This is Loving Assertiveness grounded in "feedforward"—a request for the future they can act on—rather than "feedback" which essentially says "stand there and be treated to my judgment and diagnosis."

Feedforward is actionable and future-focused; feedback often triggers defensiveness because it's about what's already wrong.

The reflection request ensures mutual understanding and gives them agency in the process. You've transformed a moment of disconnection into an opportunity for deeper trust.

# SAYING NO WITHOUT DAMAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

## ● **SCENARIO**

A colleague asks you to take on an additional project. You're already stretched thin, but you value the relationship and don't want them to feel rejected or unsupported.

## ● **THE OLD WAY (WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAY)**

"I'm really swamped right now. I just don't have the bandwidth. Sorry, I can't help."

OR (the people-pleaser version): "Um... okay, I guess I can try to fit it in somehow." [Then resent them and deliver poor work]

## ● **THE LOVING ASSERTIVENESS WAY:**

"Thank you for the request. I appreciate you trusting me with that.

Could you share with me what you were hoping for in making the request, so we can get to the needs and see if there's a better way to address them?

"I'm not sure the 'strategy' you've proposed is one that really addresses my own feelings and needs, but I'm very interested in finding out the real intent and seeing how we can find something that works."

# SAYING NO WITHOUT DAMAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

## ● WHY IT WORKS

Instead of a flat "no" that shuts down the conversation, you're saying "no to this strategy, but yes to exploring your underlying need."

You honor their request by taking it seriously enough to understand what's really driving it.

By distinguishing between their "strategy" (the specific ask) and their "needs" (what they're actually trying to accomplish), you open space for creative problem-solving. Maybe someone else can help. Maybe there's a different approach. Maybe understanding their timeline changes things.

You've protected your boundaries while deepening the relationship, because they feel heard rather than rejected.

This is feedforward in action—focusing on "how can we move forward effectively" rather than defending why you can't do what they asked.

# ADDRESSING A PATTERN YOU'VE TOLERATED TOO LONG

## ● **SCENARIO**

You and a close colleague (or family member) have fallen into a pattern where whenever tension arises, you both immediately change the subject and pretend everything is fine. But the unresolved issues are accumulating and creating distance between you.

## ● **THE OLD WAY (WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAY)**

"We need to talk. You always avoid conflict and it's really frustrating. We can't keep sweeping things under the rug."

OR (the conflict-avoidant version): [Say nothing and let the pattern continue until the relationship slowly dies or explodes]

## ● **THE LOVING ASSERTIVENESS WAY:**

"I've let you down. There is a pattern we engage in. We always cut short anything that seems not to be harmonious and we bury the feelings. And I should have flagged it.

And asked you if you wouldn't mind hearing my feeling of being frustrated and feeling stuck. I have a need for us to learn from our interactions and for us to make progress on areas we're stuck.

Does that sound good? Would you mind sharing what you believe I've said? And would you like an example?

Would it be okay, if either of us sees this, we can flag it, and find a better path together?"

# ADDRESSING A PATTERN YOU'VE TOLERATED TOO LONG

## ● WHY IT WORKS

You start by taking ownership—"I've let you down"—which immediately disarms defensiveness. You're not blaming them for the pattern; you're naming it as something you've both co-created and you're taking responsibility for not addressing it sooner.

By describing the pattern neutrally ("we always cut short") rather than making it about their character flaw, you make it safe to examine together.

Your request is pure feedforward: not "stop avoiding conflict" (judgment about the past) but "could we flag this pattern when we see it and find a better path together?" (actionable commitment for the future).

The reflection request ensures they understand you're not attacking them. You've invited them into partnership on solving the problem rather than positioning yourself as the one who's right and them as the one who's wrong.

# REPAIRING AFTER YOU'VE HANDLED SOMETHING BADLY

## ● **SCENARIO**

You had an argument with someone important to you. You were exhausted and overwhelmed, and instead of listening to their concern, you shut them down dismissively. You regret it and want to repair the damage.

## ● **THE OLD WAY (WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAY)**

"I'm sorry I snapped at you. I was tired. Can we just move on?"

OR (the defensive version): "Look, I said I was sorry. What more do you want from me? You weren't exactly perfect either."

## ● **THE LOVING ASSERTIVENESS WAY:**

"I'm saddened that I wasn't able to better express my concern and caring for you. I shut down our discussion, and was unwilling to hear you out.

That doesn't express how much I care or how deeply I care about our connection. I was tired and frightened at the time, and I am mourning how I missed an opportunity to convey caring and to hear you.

I wonder, given the importance to me has only increased, if we could reconnect there? That would mean a great deal to me."

# REPAIRING AFTER YOU'VE HANDLED SOMETHING BADLY

## ● WHY IT WORKS

You're not apologizing for your behavior—you're expressing the deeper truth about what your behavior failed to communicate: your care for them and the relationship.

By naming your own feelings ("saddened," "mourning") and your state at the time ("tired and frightened"), you help them understand without making excuses.

You're not saying "I was tired so it's okay I treated you badly"—you're saying "I was tired and that's when I failed to show up as the person I want to be for you."

The repair isn't about erasing what happened; it's feedforward—a request to reconnect and try again, honoring that the importance has "only increased."

You've transformed an apology from a perfunctory ritual into an invitation to deepen intimacy.

# ASKING FOR WHAT YOU NEED FROM SOMEONE WHO DISMISSES YOU

## ● **SCENARIO**

You've made a request of someone—perhaps a manager, partner, or family member—and they waved it off as unimportant or acted like you were being oversensitive or wasting their time.

## ● **THE OLD WAY (WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAY)**

"You never listen to me. You always act like what I say doesn't matter. I'm sick of being dismissed."

OR (the accommodating version): "Never mind, forget I said anything." [Then withdraw and build resentment]

## ● **THE LOVING ASSERTIVENESS WAY:**

"I've got to believe our relationship matters to you, to both of us. At least to the extent that we can't ignore each other. So I feel undervalued when it seems you aren't taking my point of view and request seriously.

I have a need for mutuality of respect. And so my request is, could you let me know if you don't have the emotional bandwidth at that moment to hear me out and take it seriously? And we can reconvene?

Or could you trust that I wouldn't be knowingly wasting your time, and so my request may have more meaning than how it is initially coming across? By the way, would you mind reflecting back to me what I've said to ensure no misunderstanding?"

# ASKING FOR WHAT YOU NEED FROM SOMEONE WHO DISMISSES YOU

## ● WHY IT WORKS

You lead with the assumption of good faith—"I've got to believe our relationship matters to you"—which makes it harder for them to stay dismissive without openly admitting they don't care.

By naming your feeling (undervalued) and your need (mutuality of respect), you're giving them insight into the impact of their behavior without attacking their character.

Then you offer them two dignified exits: either acknowledge they don't have bandwidth right now (which you'll respect), or trust that you're bringing something meaningful even if it's not immediately apparent. This is feedforward at its finest—you're not demanding they apologize for dismissing you; you're requesting a different way of engaging going forward.

The reflection request ensures they actually heard you and prevents the very dismissiveness you're addressing. You've made it nearly impossible for them to continue dismissing you without revealing themselves as someone who genuinely doesn't care about the relationship.